

# Mystery and Maturity in Christ in Imperial Times (Col. 1:24-29)

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## **Declaration**

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**Date: March 2020**

**S. Jeon**

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## **Abstract**

One of the important topics currently under investigation in New Testament scholarship is the attitude toward emperor worship. Previously emperor worship in the New Testament was only regarded as a political issue in terms of regime reinforcement; emperor development and early Christian development were regarded as separate areas. However, recent research indicates that emperor worship was a real religion widely accepted by the common people of the Roman Empire. If so, it is highly likely that the Colossians in Asia Minor were also influenced by emperor worship. In this imperial context, the influence of the empire worship cannot be ignored, even if the letter to the Colossians was not a message directly opposing emperor worship and Roman ideology.

Making use of a socio-rhetorical approach, the study strives to determine whether there is an imperial theology in Colossians. Focusing on Colossians 1:24-29 in particular, this paper explores the terms Christ, mystery, maturity, and the social background of the time – emperor worship and Roman ideology. The terms Christ, mystery, and maturity are firmly rooted in the Jewish heritage and are used to reveal the identity of believers in union with Christ. At the same time, these terms explore the tensions the empire exhibited. In conclusion, Colossians presents an anti-imperialist theology, firmly rooted in the Jewish heritage in the reality of imperial life. Paul was conscious of the reality of the empire when he delivered a message to the Colossians, reflecting the Christians' identity in their actual common life.

## Opsomming

Een van die belangrike onderwerpe wat tans in Nuwe Testament navorsing ondersoek word, is die houding teenoor keiser-aanbidding. Keiser-aanbidding is voorheen in die Nuwe Testament bloot beskou as 'n politieke kwessie in terme van versterking van die regime; keiser-ontwikkeling en vroeë Christelike ontwikkeling is as aparte kwessies beskou. Onlangse navorsing toon egter dat keiser-aanbidding 'n werklike geloof was wat wyd deur die gewone mense van die Romeinse Ryk aanvaar is. Indien dit so is, is dit hoogs waarskynlik dat die Kolossense in Asië Minor ook deur keiser-aanbidding beïnvloed is. In hierdie imperialistiese konteks kan die invloed van keiser-aanbidding nie geïgnoreer word nie, selfs al was die brief aan die Kolossense nie 'n boodskap wat keiser-aanbidding en Romeinse ideologie direk teengestaan het nie.

Die studie maak gebruik van 'n sosio-retoriese benadering om te bepaal of daar 'n imperialistiese teologie in Kolossense is. Dit fokus spesifiek op Kolossense 1:24-29 en ondersoek die begrippe Christus, geheimenis en volwassenheid, en die sosiale agtergrond van die tyd – keiser-aanbidding en Romeinse ideologie. Die begrippe Christus, geheimenis en volwassenheid is gewortel in die Joodse oorlewering en word gebruik om die identiteit van gelowiges in verbondenheid met Christus, te onthul. Terselfdertyd ondersoek hierdie begrippe die spanning wat in die ryk bestaan het. Ten slotte bied Kolossense 'n anti-imperialistiese teologie, gegrond in die Joodse erfenis, in die werklikheid van die imperiale bestaan. Paulus was bewus van die werklikheid van die ryk toe hy 'n boodskap aan die Kolossense gestuur het wat Christene se identiteit reflekteer in hul werklike gemeenskaplike lewe.

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## Table of contents

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Motivation.....	1
1.2 Research problem.....	1
1.3 Hypothesis.....	2
1.4 Methodology .....	4
1.4.1 Inner texture .....	5
1.4.2 Intertexture .....	5
1.4.3 Social and cultural texture .....	6
1.4.4 Ideological texture .....	6
1.4.5 Sacred texture.....	6
1.5 Aim of research and delimitation.....	7
1.6 The structure of the thesis. ....	8
 Chapter 2: The background of colossians: Structure, Heresy, Paul’s suffering .....	9
2.1 The structure of colossians.....	9
2.2 The problem of the church of colossians: the identity of the colossians heresy.....	12
2.2.1 Gnosticism, with some Jewish influence .....	15
2.2.2 Hellenism .....	18
2.2.3 Paganism .....	19
2.2.4 Judaism, with some blend of various influence .....	20
2.3 Paul’s suffering (col. 1:24) .....	23
2.4 Chapter summary .....	28
 Chapter 3: The mystery of christ and maturity .....	30
3.1 The mystery of christ .....	30

3.1.1 Introductory understanding of mystery.....	31
3.1.2 The mystery in the book of Daniel .....	33
3.1.3 The mystery in Romans .....	36
3.1.4 The mystery in 1 Corinthians.....	39
3.1.5 The mystery in Ephesians .....	43
3.1.6 The mystery in 2 Thessalonians.....	46
3.1.7 The mystery in 1 Timothy.....	47
3.1.8 The mystery in Colossians .....	49
3.2. The maturity.....	53
3.2.1 General maturity concept.....	53
3.2.2 Maturity in Colossians (1:28, 4:12) .....	54
3.3. Chapter summary .....	57
 Chapter 4: In Christ.....	 59
4.1. Previous interpretations of “in christ”.....	59
4.1.1 Adolf Deissmann .....	59
4.1.2 Wilhelm Bousset.....	60
4.1.3 Albert Schweizer.....	62
4.1.4 Rudolf Bultmann.....	63
4.1.5 E.P. Sanders .....	64
4.1.6 James D.G. Dunn .....	65
4.1.7 Michael J. Gorman.....	66
4.2. “In christ” in colossians .....	66
4.2.1 The expression used to refer to a believer .....	68
4.2.2 When expressing the characteristics of believers .....	69
4.2.3 When referring to the believers’ faith.....	71
4.2.4 When referring to the believers’ behaviour .....	72
4.2.5 When referring to union with christ (unity and participation).....	72
4.2.6 When referring to the trinity .....	73
4.2.7 The metaphorical expression “in christ”.....	74

4.3 The union with christ and the life of the christian .....	76
4.3.1 The life of community in christ .....	77
4.3.2. Family life in christ.....	79
4.4 Chapter summary .....	81
 Chapter 5: Colossians and empire.....	83
5.1 General understanding of the emperor cult.....	83
5.2. Relationship between the colossae city and emperor worship.....	86
5.3. Imperial languages and ideology in colossians.....	87
5.3.1 The hymn of christ (col. 1:15–20) .....	87
5.3.2 The relationship between mystery and philosophy (2:18) and elements (2:8, 20) .....	91
5.3.3 Unity and the image of body and baptismal formula (3:11).....	93
5.3.4 Maturity and the image of clothing (col. 3: 8–14) .....	95
5.3.5 Household code.....	98
5.4. Chapter summary .....	99
 Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	101
 Bibliography .....	104



## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Motivation**

In a 2004-publication, *Colossians Remixed: subverting the empire*, Walsh and Keesmaat argue that Paul's letter to Colossians contained an explosive and subversive counter-position against that of the Roman Empire at the time (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004). This book declared an alternative vision to reality and at the same time encouraged a way of subverting the Roman Empire (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004). A more recent publication of 2013, *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not; Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (McKnight and Modica, 2013) continues in this vein, even if with a different accent. In this book, Bevere (2013:183-195) mentions that Colossians is not directly concerned with empire, but that it does build anti-imperial theology. Emperor worship and the ideology of the Roman Empire in the New Testament has become one of the most important issues in New Testament scholarship. These books are recent examples of attempt to investigate the relationship between Colossians and the Roman Empire. The question about this relationship motivates also this researcher to think about imperial theology and anti-imperial measures, as these may be reflected in or implicated in the New Testament and in the Colossians letter in particular.

#### **1.2 Research Problem**

One of the important current topics of investigation in New Testament scholarship is about the attitude toward the emperor worship and economic detainment of the Roman Empire among the New Testament writers of the time. Did Paul and the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE evangelists express the gospel as a conscious response to Emperor worship and Rome's ideology? Did they expose Christ as a contrasting figure to the Roman emperor? Colossians are at times even related to the supposed critique among early Jesus followers against emperor worship (Maier, 2005:323-324). Walsh and Keesmaat argue that Colossians contains an imperial theology (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004). On the other hand, Bevere argue that Colossians is not directly connected with empire and does not develop an anti-imperial theology (McKnight and Modica, 2013). So does Colossians exhibit an anti-imperial theology, or does it not? Is Colossians positive,

negative or neutral about imperial theology? How could the position of Colossians be understood?

Although Colossians nowhere explicitly launched an attack against the Roman Empire, a more subtle criticism may be identified in the letter. Focusing on Colossians 1:24-29, the researcher wants to explore to what extent the nature of the focus of Pauline missionary work in imperial time is expressed by mystery.<sup>1</sup> In addition, it will study the meaning and the nature of the maturity of early Christ followers and their union with Christ in the imperial time. It will also explore whether Paul's message to the Colossians may be read as directly resisting the Roman Empire or if not, whether the influence of the empire could be ignored. The research problem guiding this investigation can therefore be summarized as follows. How could imperialism be understood in the Colossians letter? Why and what is the meaning of the expression of Christ as a mystery? What is the relationship between Christ and maturity? What is the connection between the union of Christ and imperial theology? My particular focus here will be on a section of the letter, Colossians 1:24-29.

### 1.3 Hypothesis

The underlying hypothesis of this study is that in imperial times and also as a counterfoil to imperial ideology, the identity of Christ followers was confirmed through the meaning of Christ that was expressed as mystery, and that this was at the core of Paul's missionary work. A “counter” position is not meant to be understood as if Paul were directly opposed the Empire, and certainly not that to wrote address the Empire. Rather, the argument is that Paul's position constitutes a stance that challenges Empire by arguing a view that are fundamentally different from and essentially in opposition to the imperial powers.<sup>2</sup> This central claim can be described in detail by the following hypothesis. First, at the center of Paul's missionary work is always Christ. Second, the concept of mystery that expressed Christ in Colossians may be not original, but it may be a concept borrowed from the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. Third, the word mature relates to the ministry of Christ. Fourth, the message of the Pauline letters did not

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<sup>1</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, serious questions about Pauline authorship of Colossians were raised. Since then, some scholars have argued for seeing the letter as “deutero-Pauline”, but the researcher thinks that “Pauline” is a better description. The researcher in this regard links up with Carson, Moo and Morris (2009:517).

<sup>2</sup> Typical of imperial settings, the Pauline corpus shows ambivalence (e.g. compare with Rom. 13) towards the Empire. Postcolonial theorists in the past have often identified such ambivalence as typical of hegemonic, imperial settings (see e.g. Stanley, 2011).

ignore the influence of the imperial times, even if it was not a direct resistance message of the Roman Empire, especially since emperor worship and ideology in the Roman empire contained elements that were in opposition to the kingdom of God.

Christ is recognized as standing at the center of Paul's letters. Christology is important for different reasons, but also because it relates to aspects of Christian identity in important ways (Dunn, 1998:397). Christology plays a particularly important role in Colossians 1. Christ is important in Colossians because he is the key to solving the problem of the Colossian heresy. It is not easy to solve the question of the nature of the heresy that was addressed by Colossians. However, it is clear that the letter is of the opinion that the teachings of the heresy will demote the position of Christ (Guthrie, 1990:566). Paul's purpose in writing to the Colossians was to resolve the problem of misunderstanding Christ and therefore of the life of Christ followers (Guthrie, 1990:566).

According to traditional understanding, Colossians 1 is associated with cosmic Christology. Christology has been studied in connection with wisdom, as well. Colossians 1:24-29 accounts for the incorporation of the Gentiles into the history of God, using the word mystery in a paragraph describing the apostle for the Gentiles. This means that anyone who is in the mystery of Christ can be a true Israelite in the sense of a true believer, even if they are Gentiles. Both Jews or Gentiles, who are united in Christ, are all in Christ as a sign of their identity from Christ. Therefore, it is not necessary to accept the cultural-ethnic mark required for Jews by the law of Israel (Beale and Gladd, 2014:371-372), when Gentiles turn to God. However, Colossians 1:24-29 has not been interpreted properly in this regard as the mystery of Christ.

The mystery of Christ is related to maturity. The word "maturity" has been interpreted as an exclusive moral interpretation in terms of the concept of completeness. However, maturity in Colossians 1:24-29 should be understood as further evidence for exposing the holistic and authoritative nature of Christ's ministry (Ridderbos, 1975:270-271). For these reasons, my argument is that Colossians 1:24-29 has not been interpreted for all its valuable angles, nor for its socio-historical setting informed by the Roman Empire.

The identifying of the heresy and the suffering of the letters Paul is not the main purpose of this study. However, it is part of the background of this study, so it is important to briefly

mention it. Scholars' views on the identity of heresy are generally divided between Gnosticism, Hellenistic mystery religion, Hellenistic philosophy, syncretism, and Judaism as potential sources for it. Paul expressed his suffering with the words that "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col. 1:24).<sup>3</sup> This has been interpreted in various ways. First, it is intended to complete the redemption made possible through the death of Christ. Second, it promotes the mystical union between Paul and Christ. Third, it is understood in light of messianic woes. However, in the context of Colossians, those afflictions were related to sufferings endured in the course of completing the apostolic mission. My contention is that Colossians 1:24-29 has not been interpreted adequately as far as it relates to such suffering. In Paul's missionary work, Christ can be motive, power, and purpose (Wright, 1986:86), all at once.

In sum, the mystery of Christ and maturity, as the core of the Pauline letters' missionary work in Colossians 1:24-29, has hardly been dealt with in broader context of Colossians, the Old Testament and the New Testament in imperial times. Within these imperial times, Paul intended to reveal that preaching Christ is expressed as mystery, as the essential Gospel, but this was very likely to have come in conflict with the idolatrous elements of emperor worship and ideology.

## **1.4 Methodology**

The methodology to be employed in this study is socio-rhetorical interpretation. One interpretive approach alone cannot provide authentic understanding of the New Testament texts (Green, 1995:9). When only one method is used, the meaning of the text can be limited because the text of the New Testament contains complex patterns and images (Robbins, 1996:2-3). The social-rhetorical approach explores the meaning of the text in a systematic way in terms of the prevailing literary and social-cultural environments by applying various interpretation methods (Robbins, 1996:4). Robbins (1996:1-2) says that one of the most notable contributions of socio-rhetorical criticism is to bring literary criticism, social-scientific criticism, rhetorical criticism, postmodern criticism, and theological criticism together into an integrated approach to

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations from the Bible in this thesis are based on the New Revised Standard Version, unless stated otherwise.

interpretation. “Socio-rhetorical interpretation provides a powerful interpretive analytic to explore these dialogic interrelations among authors, texts and readers/interpreters” (Gowler, 2010:203). Socio-rhetorical criticism utilises five different angles to explore multiple textures within texts: (a) inner texture; (b) intertexture; (c) social and cultural texture; (d) ideological texture; and (e) sacred texture (Robbins, 1996:3). A brief explanation of each of these dimensions is in order.

#### **1.4.1 Inner texture**

“Inner texture includes linguistic patterns within a text, structural elements of a text, and the specific manner in which a text attempts to persuade its reader. These elements are traditionally part of what is called a 'close reading' of a text, the interpretation of the literary-rhetorical features and patterns in the text” (Gowler, 2010:195). Socio-rhetorical criticism brings both literary and rhetorical techniques together to analyze aspects of words and meanings in the text (Robbins, 1996:3). By examining the linguistic patterns within the Colossians and literary form and structure, it will become even more evident how Colossians 1: 24-29 functions on literary and linguistic levels.

#### **1.4.2 Intertexture**

“A major goal of intertextual analysis is to ascertain the nature and result of processes of configuration and reconfiguration of phenomena in the world outside the text. Sometimes the text imitates another text but places different people in it. Sometimes it restructures a well-known tradition so that it ends differently or has very different implications for belief and action. Sometimes it inverts a tradition, turning the rhetoric of a previous situation on its head to create a new and distinct dramatic tradition. In each instance, the result is a text with a rich configuration of texts, cultures, and social and historical phenomena” (Robbins, 1996:40). The concept and background of an important term such as mystery and maturity can be confirmed by looking at how these terms functioned in the Old Testament and are quoted in and alluded to in the New Testament. In addition, this texture can shed light on the diversity of theology through the interaction of text.

### **1.4.3 Social and cultural texture**

“Social and cultural texture is where a text interacts with society and culture by sharing in the general social and cultural attitudes, norms and modes of interaction that are known by everyone in a society, and by establishing itself in relationship with the dominant cultural system as either sharing, rejecting or transforming those attitudes, values and dispositions” (Gowler, 2010:195). Specific social topics in the text reveal the religious responses to the world in its discourse (Robbins, 1996:71). Considering Paul's missional circumstances, knowing the community and religions in the society of the Roman Empire will greatly inform the interpretation of Colossians 1:24-29.

### **1.4.4 Ideological texture**

“Ideological texture concerns the particular alliances and conflicts nurtured and evoked by the language of the text and the language of the interpretation as well as the way the text itself and interpreters of the text position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups. Readers should recognize and interpret the ideological point(s) of view a text evokes, advocates and nurtures, as well as their own ideological point(s) of view as readers” (Gowler, 2010:195). This texture is useful for trying to understand how the letters Paul's letter to the Colossians could have been affected by or even influenced by the Roman Empire. In particular, the emperor worship and ideology would have been a strong, universal social pressure of the time. The appraisal of emperor worship and ideology can be compared with the meaning of the text to understand Paul's message more fully.

### **1.4.5 Sacred texture**

“Sacred texture refers to the manner in which a text communicates insights into the relationship between the human and the divine. This texture includes aspects concerning such things as deity, holy persons, spirit beings, divine history, human redemption, religious community and ethics” (Gowler, 2010:195). For this reason, a major way to gain a fuller understanding of the meanings and meaning-effects of sacred texture is through analysis and interpretation of other textures in the context of an understanding of its sacred texture (Robbins, 1996:130). This

texture will be used to examine the theological function of the concept of the unity of Christ in Colossians 1:24-29.

## **1.5 Aim of research and delimitation**

The purpose of this study is to reveal the reason for Colossians' emphasis on, and the meaning of mystery, which is expressed as Christ, for how it is portrayed to be at the center of Paul's mission in the Roman Empire, and to explore how Christian identities are identified in the imperial time. The choice for Colossians 1: 24-29 was brought about, since is a text that contains the concept of mystery, maturity and in Christ that can be identified in the Empire. The emphasis, then, are on these concepts rather than on the Empire as such – although the latter forms the setting in which the concepts of mystery, maturity and in Christ are discussed. Interpretation mostly explores the identity to be God's people of true Israel through the law and the religious ordinances (Dunn, 1996:180). However, this study explores the possible relationship between Jews and Gentiles that was established through the use of the term mystery in Colossians 1:24-29, and the identity of the true Israel that was confirmed through union with Christ. At the same time, I intend to explore how maturity appears as a testimony of the work of Christ. And finally, this study will explore the fact that the Emperor worship and ideology cannot be ignored, even though the Colossians letter does not appear to have directly resisted the empire.

The thesis of this study can be explained in two ways. One is in terms of the content of study and the other concerns methodology. First, regarding the content of study, it will concentrate on Colossians 1:24-29. If necessary, this study will be addressing variously the entire Colossians, the Pauline letters, and the particular text, but the focus will remain on Colossians 1:24-29. The study will focus on the core terms of the mystery of Christ, maturity, and emperor worship. Second, as for the methodology, this study will not attempt to exhaust all aspects of Robinson's social-rhetoric approach. According to Robbins "No interpreter will ever use all of the resources of socio-rhetorical criticism in any one interpretation. But no interpreter ever uses all of the resources of any method in an interpretation. The purpose is to build an environment for interpretation that provides interpreters with a basic, overall view of life as we know it and language as we use it. Within this environment, interpreters can decide to work especially energetically on one or two aspects of a text" (Robbins, 1996:2). In order to interpret the

complex context and text of Colossians, the study will focus on the “Intertexture”, “Social and cultural texture”, “Ideological texture” and “Sacred texture” in applying a socio-rhetorical approach.

## **1.6 The Structure of The thesis.**

The study will be structured as follows. Chapter 1 presents the introduction to the study. Chapter 2 will introduce the background of Colossians comprising elements such as the structure of the Colossians, the identity of heresy, and Paul's suffering. Chapter 3 deals with the meaning and background of Christ's mystery and examines the relationship between mystery and maturity. Chapter 4 examines the theological meaning of unity with Christ. Chapter 5 studies the connection of the emperor worship of Rome with ideology and Colossians. Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation with a brief summary.



## Chapter 2:

### The context of Colossians: Structure, Heresy, Paul's Suffering

#### 2.1 The structure of Colossians

The following discussion in Chapter 2 is aligned with the social and cultural texture of socio-rhetorical criticism. Paul's letter to the Colossians follows the format of most letters from the Greek and Roman world.<sup>4</sup> Further to the argument regarding authorship, the Empire forms the backdrop for the document, whether the letter is dated early (before 60 CE) or later towards the end of the first century. Since it is not my argument that the letter attacked any specific imperial figure, the date of the letter, whether early or late, still sees the letter situated firmly within Roman imperial times. The Greek and Roman world format generally consists of an opening, the body, and the closing. Paul uses the typical format of Greek and Roman world's letter consistently, but he adjusts it in his own way (Murphy-O'Connor, 1995:42-45). In this case, what kind of logical structure and format does he present in Colossians or does the letter not reflect this? This question has been raised and solved in a variety of ways.

According to Barth & Blanke (1994:41), W. Bujard's evaluation regarding the presence of a logical structure and thinking in Colossians is negative because words or conjunctions forming logical relationships are missing, and there is no evidence of sharp contrasts and comparisons. His analysis also revealed that the introductory expression of thanksgiving which has been acknowledged as the authoritative and canonical from the earliest time is not present in this letter.

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<sup>4</sup> At this time, the famous and influential German critic F. C. Baur rejected Pauline authorship, and the issue has been a topic of scholarly debate ever since, with (Moo, 2008:30). According to Brown (1997:610), about 60 percent of critical scholarship holds that Paul did not write the Colossians. But, scholars Kümmel (1975:340-346), C.F.D. Moule (1962:13-14), F. F. Bruce (1984:28-33), Peter T. O'Brien (1982:xli-xlii), and David E. Garland (1998:17-22) still argue that Paul is the author. Scholars on both sides of the debate on authorship generally agree that the key to resolving this debate is the Greek language style and theological issue in Colossians (Moo, 2008:32). I believe that to describe Colossians as Pauline is better, since the letter is clearly part of the Pauline tradition. Firstly, in terms of Greek language style, Carson and Moo (2009:518) say that "Colossians has quite a number of hapax legomena, but this is not a strong argument against the authenticity of this epistle, for the same is true of all of Paul's letters". Second, in theology, although certain important concepts (e.g. justification, law, and salvation) are absent and other concepts not found elsewhere are present in Colossians, this is not an issue as similar observations may be made about some of Paul's other letters (Carson and Moo, 2009:518). And in terms of the Pauline character of Colossians, typical Pauline themes are consistently mentioned Paul's theological issues: the teaching of the letter on authority, on Christ, on the church, and on eschatology (Moo, 2008:32).

Dunn (1996:41-42), on the other hand, argues that the structure of Colossians is in the format typical of Paul's letters. In particular, it is surprising that, according to his analysis, the scope of thanksgiving in Colossians is extensive. The structure of Colossians as analysed by him suggests that the opening part contains the address and greeting (1:1-2), that the thanksgiving is extended (1:3-23) and is followed by a personal statement (1:24-2:5). The body of the letter presents the theme (2:6-4:6) and the conclusion follows (4:7-18). The extended thanksgiving is understood as being 1:3-23, but in practice, substantial development of the thanksgiving (1:9-2:5) extends to a broad perspective particularly.

Barth & Blanke (1994:41-42) evaluated that J. Lahemann understood the structure of Colossians as a literary work because the letter clearly presents a chiasm or ring organisation. He explains that it reveals three concentric circles. First, the outermost circle is constituted by the opening (1:1-2) and closing (4:7-18). Second, the middle circle is formed by the teaching of Christ (1:3-2:5) and ethics (3:1-4:6). Third, the core of the circle is the argument against philosophy (2:6-23). The argument against the Colossians' philosophy emphasises that the teaching about Christ and related ethics are the most essential parts which are deeply related.

Barth & Blanke (1994:42) divides the structure of the Colossians letter into four parts: The two main parts are the opening (1:1-2) and the conclusion (4:18). The body is further divided into four sections. The first section contains the thanksgiving and an intercession and is focused on spiritual growth (1:3-11). The second section contains the Hymn of Christ, the apostolic ministry, and reconciliation of all things and persons through Christ (1:12-25). The third section presents a complete life in Christ as opposed to the religion created by humans (2:6-3:4). The last section focuses on the mission of the church (3:5-4:17). The first and last sections are the central parts of this letter. However, the second and third sections cover a wide range that has no comparison in Paul's letters. He broadened the scope of the preamble by including the Hymn of Christ in his introduction, and his thinking concerning the mission of church forms the core of this letter. In view of this, he suggests that the understanding of Christ offered here may be understood as being based on background of Colossians.

Lohse (1971:89-90) explains that the sentence structure and sequence in the letter to the Colossians is more distinctive than any of Paul's other letters. Colossians is marked by a liturgical-hymn style, and the verbose expressions and words are well arranged in long

sentences that are closely interlocked (Lohse, 1971:89). In other words, Colossians has a unified logical structure of format and content. He classifies Colossians as teaching (chapter 1-2) and encouragement (Chapters 3-4), and analyses four categories, namely introductory greetings, an instructional portion, a hortatory portion and the concluding section. The first part, the introductory greeting (1:1-2), presents thanksgiving for the good state of the community's progress (1:3-8) in knowledge and in their conduct of life (1:9-11). The second part includes a hymn of praise and the hymn about Christ's work (1:12-20), words of reconciliation (1:21-23), the office of the apostle (1:24-2:5), and a proclamation of the apostolic gospel to defeat false teachings (2:6-23). This is described in two parts. First, those who confess Jesus as Lord follow his dominion (2:6-15); second, those who belong to the Lord are unable to obey false teachings or worship the cosmic elements (2:16-23). The third part, the hortatory section, stresses that those who have been raised with Christ are to seek that which is above (3:1-4) in thanksgiving and praise through Christ (3:5-17), the reality of obedience to the Lord in the community (3:18-4:1), followed by an admonition to the entire community (4:2-6). The last part is the concluding section and contains personal messages, greetings and short instructions (4:7-18). The content can also be described in two large content structures. The first is the universal scope of Christ's sovereignty and the second is the personalisation of Christ's sovereignty to cover all areas of believers' lives. Remarkably visible in this structure is that Christ is the Lord of all things, and his people must do everything in the name of Christ (Lohse, 1971:90). In addition, among the letters of Paul letter, Colossians is particularly characterised by thanksgiving (1:9-2:5).

J. Callow approaches the text analytically and explains the structure of the Colossians in terms of semantics (Callow, 1983:19-22). He divides the letter into an introduction (1:1-2), a body (1:3-4:6), and a conclusion (4:7-18). The body is further divided into 1:13- 2:5 and 2:6- 3:17. In this structure, 1:13-14 should be understood as belonging to the body, so that the thanksgiving and prayer of 1:3-12 should be separated from body. Callow insisted that the Hymn of Christ represents the main body of Colossians.

Wright (1986:23) argues that the letter is not a standard theology treatise that begins with doctrine and ends with ethics or practical teachings. This also means that it is not simply a letter that can be divided into consecutive units. After the first greeting (1:1-2), Paul's broad thanksgiving (1:3-8) goes over into the intercession (1:9-23), and from this prayer he teaches

about maturity in Christ (1:24-2:5), which is his actual purpose. In addition, it begins with the exhortation to walk in Christ (2:6-7), a key part of Colossians, and attacks false teaching (3:8-19) that hinders the maturation of Christ believers. After that, the idea is explained in detail (2:30-3:4), and it goes on to a summary of the whole appeal and the core recommendation, doing it in the name of Jesus (3:5-11) and giving thanks to God (3:12-17). This applies specifically to two areas of everyday life: the home (3:18-4:1) and the world (4:2-6). The letter is closed by conveying greetings to Colossians. What is shown by this structure is that the letter reflects actual conditions, not an abstract notion about Christ, making it clear that doctrines and practices are not indistinguishable from life. Wright (1986:24) claimed “all is doctrine, all is practice, all is worship, because all is Christ”.

The above-mentioned structure of Colossians has its own advantages, disadvantages and emphases. Colossians follows the general format of Greek and Roman world letters. Such letters are divided into opening, body, and closing sections, and have a clear logical structure. Although the emphasis is different for each scholar, of which some examples were provided above, the facts are that, in Colossians, we see through these structures firstly, that the Hymn of Christ in the introduction and a part of thanksgiving stands out clearly; second, the core of the letter explains Paul's mission; and third, that it is a letter that commends a Christ-centred life of maturity in this world.

## **2.2 The problem of the church of Colossians: The identity of the Colossians heresy**

It is not easy to identify Paul's exact purpose in writing the Colossians. However, Moo (2008:47) makes it clear that he believes that the purpose of writing the letter to the Colossians is “to encourage the Colossians to resist some kind of erroneous teaching”, and the phrases on which this claim is based is “deceived by fine-sounding arguments” (2:4); “captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy” (2:8); “judging” (2:16); and “disqualifying” (2:18). Lohse (1971:3) has written that the author of the letter is deeply worried that the community may be led astray by false teaching and become the victim of deceivers. Clearly, false teachings in the Colossian church show that the faith is threatened and that there is a problem of a community in crisis. The purpose of the letter responds to the threat of this false teaching, which needed immediate correction (Guthrie, 1990:571). If so, the purpose of the letter to the Colossians may

be that they should not be deceived by false teachings under the threat of faith, and it may also suggest ways of overcoming attacks and addressing the crisis.

The false teaching of Colossians has been expressed in various ways. There is a long tradition<sup>5</sup> describing it as “heresy”. However, Dunn (1996:24-25) argues that the use of the word heresy is not appropriate here.<sup>6</sup> The reason is that there was already a clear conception of “Christian orthodoxy” from other religious groups of time to mark “Christianity” and to clarify the boundaries that distinguish it from all counterfeiting and perversion (heresy). As for orthodoxy and heresy, it is a well-defined and unified category only by the time of the second century, and is therefore not appropriate to describe the shortcomings of the enemies reflected in Colossians (Dunn, 1996:24). It has been generally assumed that Paul responds to false teachings that were one of the real or potential threats to the Colossian church; however, Dunn also argues that Paul does not address the Colossians with the same level of intensity as he addresses the Galatians (Dunn, 1996:25). But it may be reasonable to call what is addressed in Colossians a heresy because there is a problem of teaching the faith while other teachings are threatening the community, even though there is no definite evidence of the notion of heresy in the first century.<sup>7</sup> From a new perspective, Hooker (1990:135) likes to talk about tendencies rather than clear-cut systems pointing out the existence of the Colossian heresy, and also suggests that young converts were under external pressure to conform to the beliefs and practices of Jewish and pagan neighbours. However, Guthrie (1990:1263) writes as follows about the heresy:

In the light of 2:8-23, with its references to “fulfillment, specific instructions about self-discipline (“Do not handle” etc. v 21), regulations about food and holy days, unusual phrases which seem to be catchwords of Paul’s opponents and the strong emphasis on what Christ has already achieved by his death and resurrection, it seems appropriate to speak of a “heresy” which had just begun to make some inroads into the congregation.

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<sup>5</sup> Smith (2006:19-20) described it as the “Colossian philosophy”, the “Colossian error” and the “errorists” because Paul expresses the difference between truth and error through expressions such as “the word of truth, the Gospel” and, conversely, “empty deceit”.

<sup>6</sup> Dunn points out terms connected with “heresy” as “false teaching”, the “errorists” and the “philosophy”.

<sup>7</sup> Scholars have many ways to express the false teaching of Colossians but, the term will be denoted as the “Colossian heresy” or “heresy” in this thesis.

When carefully applying “mirror-reading”, the following elements of heresy are revealed:<sup>8</sup> The phrases most scholars agree as pointing toward heretical notions with regard to Colossians 2:8-23, include “hollow and deceptive philosophy” (8); “depends on human tradition” (8, 22); “depends on ... the elemental spiritual forces of this world” (8); do “not depend on ... Christ” (8); “holy days” (16); ascetic discipline (18); “worship of angels” (18); “[going] into great detail about what they have seen” (18); “their unspiritual minds puff them up with idle notions” (18); “the head” of the body, Christ (19); and “worldly” (20–23) (Moo, 2008:50-51).

If these phrases do indeed refer to the heresy, what is the nature of the Colossians heresy? It is not easy to identify the nature of heresy. Gunther (1973:3-4) has argued that those who opposed Paul and his teaching could be reconstructed into 44 different types of teachings. Hooker (1990:121-135), on the other hand, raised the question of whether antagonists were present in the context of Colossians. DeMaris (1994:38-39) identified five categories, namely “Jewish Gnosticism”, “Gnostic Judaism”, “Mystical Judaism”, “Hellenistic Syncretism” and “Hellenistic Philosophy” among the more than forty opponents of Paul identified so far. Smith (2006:21-37) identified four categories: “Essene Judaism and Gnosticism”, “Hellenism”, “Paganism” and “Judaism”.

By looking at the characteristics of the heresies described in Colossians we will now try to identify the identity of the heresy of the Colossians on the basis of the suggestions made so far by other scholars. The identity of the heresy will expected to present a background revealing the problems of the Colossians and the characteristics of the gospel of Paul.

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<sup>8</sup> “Mirror reading” is the process of reconstructing the background of a letter in incidental references. According to Barclay (1987:74-78), there are four pitfalls in mirror reading: First, it can select the opponents of the wrong conversation. The second point is that this is not rational conversation but a fierce debate in which Paul feels his whole identity and mission threatened. The third point is that a complicating factor lies in the linguistic problem of knowing only one partner in a particular conversation. Finally, his polemic has the possibility of a polarizing effect. Sumney (1999:23) therefore asks two questions of the text: first, “How certain we can be that a statement refers to opponents?” and, second, “How reliable that statement is. To make these judgments we must distinguish among various types of statements and different kinds of contexts”. Therefore, a most important element of mirror reading is the “context”.

### 2.2.1 Gnosticism, with some Jewish influence

Lightfoot (1970:73-74) claims that the Colossian heresy is a mixture of the Judaic concept of Gnosticism.<sup>9</sup> He saw, what is called the philosophy, as a form of syncretistic Judaism. The Jewish references to the Sabbath, circumcision, the new moon and the distinctions regarding meat and drink are clear, but it includes the concept of unfamiliar Jewish thought, which include the elements of theosophical speculation, a shadowy mysticism engaging certain spiritual agencies and intermediate beings. He compared the three major sects of Judaism, the Sadducees, the Pharisees and the Essenes, with the Greco-Roman philosophical school, and thought that the strict asceticism of the Essenes was appropriate for the idea of Gnosticism (Lightfoot, 1970:82-83). He also claims that this kind of Jewish thought and practice was present in Asia Minor in the first century. Therefore, it is argued that the terms wisdom, intelligence, knowledge, and perfect knowledge in Colossians, as well as secrecy encountered in the letter to the Colossians should be explained through Gnosticism (Lightfoot, 1970:100-102). As can be seen from “angel worship” (Col. 2:18), there apparently was philosophical speculation about intermediate beings between God and man in the community (Lightfoot, 1970:103-104). So, Smith (2006:22) says that “Lightfoot saw a link between Essenism and Gnosticism in the Colossian error”.

The possibility of an association between Colossian philosophy and the Essenes has been given more credibility by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Davies (1962:107, 158-60) claimed that the Sabbath matter, dietary matters, special wisdom and access to knowledge, worship of angels and principalities of power, all contain an implicit hint of dualism suggesting that the world is inhabited by evil forces.

Benoit (1968:17) proposed that the speculation about the spiritual powers, the exact observance of the food law, festivals, and the speculation about the power of the angels was consistent with the heretical Jewish viewpoint held in the Qumran community. Yamauchi (1964:142-151) focused on similarities, such as eating habits, concern for calendrical matters, especially an

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to explain the exact meaning of the term Gnosticism when discussing heresy in the New Testament because the term refers to the amorphous second century systems of Irenaeus' and Hippolytus' arguments (Wilson, 1958:64-68). Earlier tendencies towards systematic Gnosticism of this type are labelled 'pre-Gnosticism' or 'incipient Gnosticism'.



interest in observing the Sabbath day. Moreover, the philosophical interest in secret knowledge or mysteries and angels pointed to an Essene background. He argued that philosophy represents the transition stage between the Essene heterodoxy and Gnosticism, and concluded that the Colossian heresy was not the same as the Essenes' beliefs and practices. Kümmel (1975:339-340) also said that angelic worship mentioned in Colossians rather was a mystery religion, was not related to Gnosticism and could not be taken as the background of the Colossian heresy. O'Brien (1982:xxxiv) believed that the Colossian heresy cannot be described as a variant of the Essene or the Qumran doctrine because Colossians generally cannot find a terms that emphasises the ritual washing that appears to have played an important role among the Essenes and in the Qumran community.

Lyonnet (1975:147-148) argued that pagan Gnosticism does not appear in the Colossian heresy. The words *πλήρωμα* and *σῶμα* are derived from common usage and are commonly found among the Stoics (Lyonnet, 1975:148). He argued that, in Gnosticism, angelic worship was included through the Mosaic Law and the angel who was supposed to preside was honoured (Lyonnet, 1975:149-150). He also objected to scholars establishing the pagan mystery theory of Colossians basing it on the word *ἐμβατεύω* (Lyonnet, 1975:150) after analysing commonalities between the Colossian heresy and the Dead Sea materials, particularly the “the body of flesh” (2:11), “mystery” (1:26), “philosophy” (2: 8) “calendars associated with the day and month and season”, intercession between God and man, the interest in fantasy angels, and the role of Christ in the Creator which are subjects of the various sources of the Qumran scrolls (Lyonnet, 1975:150-153). He could not find any correspondence between Colossians and the use of *ἐμβατεύω* and the Claros inscriptions. He also did not find any historical connection between Colossians and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Thus, although Lyonnet's conclusions were accepted by subsequent scholars, a revaluation of the premise that the non-Judaic background is inherent in the Colossians' philosophy was required (Smith, 2006:34). According to Francis and Mix, the Jewish tendency existed earlier in time than the Greek tendency, and that the doctrine focused on purity. However, Lyonnet clearly did not suggest a reason why the Jewish possibility is more probable than pagan (O'Brien, 1982: xxxvi).

Unlike Dibelius, Bornkamm (1975:123-137) claimed that the Colossian heresy concerned various Jewish Gnostics. He argued that Jewish Gnosticism was influenced by Caldera's astrology, which was related to Iranian-Persian elements and Christian faith (Bornkamm,



1975:132-135). The one word he considered important was στοιχείων (2:8, 20) but he also identified the words ἀρχῆς (2:10), ἐξουσίας (2:10, 15), θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων (2:18) and “πλήρωμα” (2:9) (Bornkamm, 1975:124-125). According to Bornkamm, these terms are similar to the Gnostic belief that the Colossian heresies manifest the divine fullness in personal, angelic power (Bornkamm, 1975:126). In addition to these terms, holy day (2:16) and circumcision (2:11) present Jewish elements and dietary restrictions (2:16, 21) (Bornkamm, 1975:127-129). It is doubtful whether a syncretistic Gnostic-Jewish-Iranian cosmological-astrological religion actually existed, and whether integrated, as Bornkamm proposed. In Colossians, nothing at all is said about this (O’Brien, 1982:xxxv).

Wright (1986:29) claims that Paul's entire argument in Colossians is a warning to Judaism. The way for God's people to reach maturity is not in being Jewish, but in applying the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection to individuals and communities. Wright (1986:29) wrote: “This means that those theories which find parallels to certain aspects of the Colossian ‘situation’ in Gnosticism, mystery religions or other philosophies, such as Stoicism and Pythagoreanism, are not necessary”.

Lightfoot's contribution to an understanding of the Colossian philosophy has been significant. He located the error within the Essene sect of Judaism, and his findings have been strengthened since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Nevertheless, many questions arise. Gnosticism is often mentioned when discussing the Colossian heresy, but it is from the second century only that it became a movement with a coherent system in its own right. There is also no mention of the convergence of gnostic elements in the Colossians. The Colossian heresy has a Jewish element (2:16-17). Colossae was a cosmopolitan city in terms of cultural diversity, and it would have been characterised by a mix of diverse religious, philosophical, and cultural contexts and Jews living there would have been under the influence of the Roman Empire, too (Moo, 2008:53). Smith (2006:24) poses some lingering questions: “What was the relationship between the Essenes and Jews of the Lycus Valley? If the Colossian heresy engaged in the worship of angels (understood as an objective genitive), why did Paul not condemn this practice as idolatry? Is it possible to date a syncretistic Gnosticism that worshipped intermediaries in the first century?” Such questions lead me to consider a further possibility, that the Colossian heresy might have been a phenomenon of Hellenism generally.

### 2.2.2 Hellenism

M. Dibelius has argued originally for the Gnostic background of the philosophy of the Jews by studying inscriptions discovered in the sanctuary of Apollo at Claros. According to Dibelius (1975:69), the Colossian heresy was influenced by Apuleius's Isis mystery cult. Concerning the word ἐμβατεύων in Colossians 2:18, Dibelius argued that it was a technical term for the process of entering the sanctuary in the practices of mystery cults (Dibelius, 1975:89). According to Dibelius, there is no Jewish element in the Colossian heresy. The angels cannot communicate with non-Jews, observing dates are related to the worship of stars, and circumcision is a term of the author of Colossians, not necessarily referring to the Jewish practice (Dibelius, 1975:91-95). In terms of Jewish tendencies, he indicated the excellence and exclusiveness of Paul's religion (Dibelius, 1975:90). For Dibelius then, the heresy of Colossae is best seen as a Hellenistic mystery cult. Smith (2006:26), however, pointed out that Dibelius focused on the word ἐμβατεύων without paying enough attention to the mention of the Jewish background. The Sabbath and the circumcision could not be part of the worship of the mysteries of Hellenism, as it was a particular Jewish legacy that distinguished Jews from Gentiles.

According to Schweitzer (1982:136) the word στοιχεῖα was evidence of the Pythagoreans and the newly awakening Platonism. Paul would have seen this as a threat to the world as indicated by the four elements of the universe (Schweitzer, 1982:131). Except for the mention of the Sabbath, there is no other references to the Law of Moses among the laws in Colossians 2:16 and the nature of the Colossian heresy reflects Greek philosophy (Schweitzer, 1982:155). DeMaris (1994:16-17), for example, sees the background of the Colossians philosophy as Middle Platonic. She also claimed that the Colossian philosophy was clearly linked to the philosophical calendar (2:16), the stress on humility (2:18, 23) and the pursuit of wisdom are combined with Christian elements. De Maris' important contribution is in devoting special attention to literature and epigraphical evidence that focus on the relationship between Hellenistic philosophy and Colossian philosophy (Smith, 2006:29). The influence of Judaism on philosophy has not been evaluated well, however. The common point that both Schweitzer and DeMaris make is that the Colossian philosophy does not reveal any Jewish character.

Martin (1996:58-65) considered Cynic philosophy in terms of the Colossian heresy. He respects the philosophical methods of human tradition regarding the elements of the universe

in order to persuade the Colossians, and views the specific practices of Christian worship service critically. Ultimately, all traditions based on worshipping the elements of the universe is absolutely excluded from the Christ believers' practice (Martin, 1996:56-57). As the community is criticised for beliefs that it already held, it was understood that the Colossian heresy originated not from within but from outside the community. Smith (2006:29-30) has pointed out that Martin's approach is novel, but lacking in significant exegetical evidence.

### 2.2.3 Paganism

Arnold (1996:5) claims that the Colossian heresy is a syncretism of pagan folk and Jewish religion.<sup>10</sup> It can be connected to local Phrygian religious traditions and Anatolian Judaism (Arnold, 1996:3). Thus, Arnold investigated inscriptions and archaeological evidence from Phrygia, Lydia, Caria, and Asia Minor. He focused on three key terms: the first term is θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων (2:18), which signifies veneration of angels as angels asking for protection from evil spirits (Arnold, 1996:90-102). The second word, ἐμβατεύων (2:18), refers to a mystical cult, as described by Dibelius (Arnold, 1996:104-157). The third term τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (2:8) was understood as the power of a personified evil spirit associated with or stars and fate (Arnold, 1996:158-159). Marshall (2004:211) has suggested that the Colossian philosophy syncretised elements of the religions of Asia and Jewish elements.<sup>11</sup> Arnold's argument is helpful in solving the puzzle of philosophy because it is based on an important and rich document, but relying more on background material than on the interpretation of the Colossian text may reveal a weakness, because the text in Colossians does not directly address the matter of magic, amulets, spells, and charms (Smith, 2006:32). Bevere (2003:40), however, pointed out two problems with Arnold's analysis. The first is that the folklore of Colossians proposed by Arnold depends on later evidence, as opposed to confirming contemporary evidence, and, second, he reveals the choice of biased evidence because he does not accept Hekalot literature (a genre of Jewish esoteric and revelatory texts), which he sees as precisely

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<sup>10</sup> The view of the Colossian heresy as a mixture is similar to the viewpoint of Dibelius, but the difference is that the emphasis is on pagan or folk religion. Especially significant in this regard are the many "angel" inscriptions discovered in Asia Minor, the ἐμβατεύων inscriptions from Claros and Notion, inscriptional and literary evidence pertaining to the Judaism of Asia Minor, and the inscriptional and literary evidence illuminating our understanding of local pagan cults (such as the cults of Apollo, Men, Theos Hypsistos, Cybele and Attis, et al.) (Arnold, 1996:3-4)

<sup>11</sup> Marshall sees the Colossian heresy as a spiritual power that threatens human life, and the way to block the influence of such spiritual powers is abstinence. He believes that angels play a role in protecting them from such spiritual powers, and Christ not being stronger than these spiritual powers, he could not overcome their influence.

the latter. Moo (2008:58-59), though, claims this is the best explanation despite the weakness of Arnold's reconstruction. He argues that Arnold's Judaism and Phrygian folk religion suggestions reflect the reality of life. Most people do not adhere to a “pure form” of any religion or philosophy in real life, but to a set of beliefs derived from various origins. An international city like Colossae exposed to various religions and philosophies would have been susceptible to such a mixed faith.

#### **2.2.4 Judaism, with some blend of various influence**

Most scholars agree about the philosophy of the Colossians being related in one way or another to Judaism. The publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls supports the existence of various forms of Judaism in the first century (Smith, 2006:33).

Francis (1975:185) argued that the Colossian philosophy comprised ascetic-mystic piety in the Hellenistic world, not specifically Gnostic, not entirely Jewish. He understood that the core text for understanding the problem of the Colossian heresy is Colossians 2:18 (Francis, 1975:163-185). The word *ταπεινοφροσύνη* in Colossians shows that it was used by the enemies of the Colossians to represent the ascetic practices which had been effective in receiving the mystery of heaven (Francis, 1975:167-171). *Ἐμβατεύων* which has an important meaning in this verse, relates to the word *ταπεινοφροσύνη*. It does not define “entering” in the meaning of the Claros inscription but “entering into possession” (Francis, 1975:171-176). He also argued that the phrase, *θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων* was mainly used in the objective genitive, but he understood it as a subjective genitive, “the angel’s worship”, so entering into the sky is not merely a mystery, but a going into the sky to accomplish a purpose (Francis, 1975:176-180). The practice of philosophy therefore concerns a mysterious vision or a journey that gives a foretaste of heaven. Francis saw Paul's response as Christology, but Francis did not fully understand the achievement of Christ; Christ does not have to struggle to enter into the realm of heaven as he has occupied this place over all rule and authority (Smith, 2006:34). O'Brien (1982:xxxviii) also deals with the Colossian heresy within the scope of Jewish-Hellenistic piety, even if it does not have Essene-Gnostic labels. He also pointed out that the general assumption that the Colossian heretics worshipped angels followed ancient errors based on poor and inadequate evidence.

Bandstra reassessed Francis's theory of the heresy as related to ascetic-mystic piety. He pointed out the controversy in the Jewish eschatology that emphasises God's unmediated activities. He affirmed that Jewish tradition was the result of God's personal and direct action. Having direct fellowship with the world of angels and heaven, the mysteries of the universe and redemption are directly possible because the enemies in the Colossians do not need their experience of the divine mediator. Angels were the messengers of God, and they had important functions (Bandstra, 1974:329-343). Bandstra's proposal about the need for a mediator is generally held as unacceptable, but his study of angelic worship is being accepted by scholars (Smith, 2006:36).<sup>12</sup>

F. F. Bruce suggested that the Jewish ascetic practices of the opponents at Colossae were influenced by Jewish Merkabah mysticism (Bruce, 1984:195-206). Merkabah mysticism is a religious discipline designed to make it easy to enter into a vision of the chariot of heaven with God visibly enthroned above it. This is the vision that was given when Ezekiel was anointed by God (Ezek. 1:15-28). To obtain this requires observance of the details of the law of Moses, especially the law of purification (Bruce, 1984:201-202). In the rabbinical tradition there is a famous article given to Rabbi Aqiba and three of his companions once with the privilege of entering paradise. Bruce (1984:202) explains that "Aqiba was the only one of the four to return unscathed. Of the others, one died, one went mad, and one committed apostasy". Those with mystical experiences tend to place more emphasis on experience than on the truth of the Word (Bruce, 1984:202). In this context, Paul would also have taught the mysterious experience of Paradise (2 Cor. 12:2-9) and the richness of the revelation of Paul's physical thorn (2 Cor. 12:7) (Bruce, 1984:202-203). It explains Merkabah mysticism in conjunction with "inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" in Colossians 2:18.

Lincoln (1981:110-113) argued that Jewish-Merkabah mysticism is similar to the fantastic heavenly experience of Greek mysticism, and that it comes from a mixture rather than being specifically Jewish. Segal, on the other hand, maintains that Jewish mysticism in the first century centred on apocalypticism (Segal, 1990:40-71). Among scholars, Jewish mysticism is understood as emphasising different things. As Sumney (1999:211-213) puts it, the false

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<sup>12</sup> The most prominent scholar supporting this is C. Evans. He uses the sort of mysticism found in Qumran and rabbinical tradition as the background Colossian or Judaism mysticism (Evans, 1982:188-205).

teachings of the Church of Colossae clearly show ascetic mysticism. These teachings can also be related to Jewish aspects. Ultimately, the mixed background has the potential to be combined with Jewish mystical teachings.

Moo (2008:55) summarises the weaknesses of the view that the Colossian heresy was constituted by Judaic mysticism in three ways. First, the interpretation of “angelic worship”, which is the premise of this view, is not altogether persuasive.<sup>13</sup> Second, it is not a clear explanation of whether Paul intends to express Christ's superiority (1:16, 20, 2:10, 15). Those who support the suggestion of “Jewish mysticism” argue that the angels in 2:18 are not the same as “the powers and authorities” of the other verses, but it may be more reasonable to interpret spiritual existence as a whole in Colossians. The third reason is that it does not provide an adequate explanation for emphasising rules. The rules seem to have more significance than preparation for a vision.

As we saw in the section above, it would be difficult to set Colossians heresy into a single category. I agree that Colossians heresy should include the Jewish aspect. In particular, the ritual, mystical, and financial acts of Colossians 2:8-23 may be explained from a Jewish perspective. Nevertheless, what Arnold insisted of a syncretism of pagan folk and Jewish religion cannot be ignored. because Judaism and Phrygian folk religion suggestions reflect the reality of life.

The Colossians were suffering from heresy and the Apostle Paul hoped not to be drift away from assurance by the gospel (Col. 1:23). So, Paul say that the nature of his ministry in Christ is explained in Colossians 1: 24-29 (Wright, 1986:91). It is that Paul highlights the extent to which his proclamation of the gospel involves suffering (1:24) and struggle (1:29; 2:1), and both of these themes are designed to encourage the Colossian Christians to withstand their adherence to the true gospel (Moo, 2008:148). According to Moo (2008:148), “the christological focus of God’s word and purpose provides theological motivation for staying the course, while the example of Paul’s sacrificial ministry on their behalf provides personal motivation toward the same end”. The nature of this suffering will be covered in the next section.

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<sup>13</sup> Moo (2008:227) claims that this phrase should be taken as a traditional interpretation. This phrase should be “worship offered to angels” rather than “worship offered by angels”.

### 2.3 Paul's suffering (Col. 1:24)

Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία (Col 1:24).

The church of Colossae was suffering because of the heresy problem, and Paul connects it with true credentials lie as an apostle in Christ. In other words, Paul says that the suffers as the nature of sacrificial ministry in Christ. The church in Colossae was not founded by Paul. The gospel is believed to have been transmitted here by Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12, 13). Paul had also never visited the church himself (Col. 1:4; 2:1) and he even was in prison in Rome when he wrote the letter.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Paul says that “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col. 1: 24). Why did Paul say “rejoice in my sufferings for your sake”? What was the suffering Paul mentions? What does it mean to “complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body”?

As Michaelis (1964:930-935) in TDNT suggested, “suffering” is the mostly used meaning of the word παθήμα while “affliction” or “misfortune” were used from the time by the tragedians. The word does not appear in the LXX, but it is always used as a plural in the NT. It is mostly used as “suffering” (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 1:5-7; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 3:11; Heb. 2:9, 10; 10:32; 1 Pet. 1:11; 4:13; 5:1-9), and rarely as “passion” and “impulse” (Gal. 5:24; Rom. 7:5). Paul used to refer to the sufferings of all Christians as part of the sufferings of Christ (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor. 1:5-7; Phil 3:10). Elsewhere Paul refers to suffering (by using various words including θλίψις, ἀσθένεια, etc.) as absolutely necessary for apostolic mission (1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 11:23-33; 12:9-10; 13:4 Gal 6:17) and as being bound up with the declaration of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4-6; 7-18; 5:18-21; 6:1-11; cf. 1 Th. 1:5, 6; 3:3, 4, Act. 14:22). As an apostle, the gospel and suffering are inseparable. O’Brien (1982:76) has argued that the passages of 2 Cor. 1:3-11 and Col. 1:24 are parallel as the words “sufferings” (θλίψις) and “afflictions” (παθήμα) appear in both passages at the same time, but θλίψις and παθήμα in Col. 1:24 are

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<sup>14</sup> The researcher agrees with the theory that Paul wrote Colossians from a prison in Rome, but some scholars support the theory of Caesarea, or Ephesus (Carson & Moo, 2009:521-522).



reversed. The former, as used of apostles, represents the actual experienced sufferings that Paul underwent when performing his mission, and the latter is used for the afflictions of Christ, which has been interpreted in many ways.

Col. 1:24 became an interpretive challenge due to Kremer's interpretation (O'Brian, 1982:75). The Greek expression τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ may be rendered by "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions". Kremer accepted that the sufferings of Christ were insufficient or inadequate. This interpretation suggests that those who followed Christ could contribute by their own sufferings and overcome the inadequacy through continuing atonement (O'Brian, 1982:76). This view has been widely abandoned because Paul clearly believed that God's actions were completed through Christ (Rom. 5:8–10; 8:3; 1 Cor. 1:13; 2 Cor. 5:18–19) (Talbert, 2007:201). H. Windisch also claimed that, since the vicarious suffering of Christ still continued, it had to be supplemented by the apostle Paul (O'Brian, 1982:77). According to O'Brian (1982:77–78) evaluated, this view has recently been rejected by scholars, given the fact that Paul's redeeming practices and experiences of general suffering recorded in the New Testament were not used for the suffering of Christ, as was correctly pointed out by Staab and Schweizer. Paul uses the concepts of blood, cross, and death to refer to redemptive action (O'Brian, 1982:7). In addition, in Colossians itself, Paul says that all our sins have been forgiven by Christ's death on the cross (2:13, 14; cf. 1:12–14, 19–22).

The second influential interpretation is in the context of a mystical union with Christ. From this perspective, the afflictions of Christ are the sufferings experienced in the mystical fellowship with Jesus Christ. Though Deissmann and Schmid thought this phrase applied only to Paul, Schneider and Dibelius thought that this phrase refers to the whole church (O'Brian 1982:78). In other words, the view of the mystical union is to explain the relationship existing between Christ and Paul, and Christ and the believers who make up the Church. The concept of the unity of Christ is endorsed also in Philippians 3:10. The result of the relationship in this mystical union is that Christian sufferings participate in the suffering of Christ. A popular view in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries understood the genitive of τοῦ Χριστοῦ as its object and understood it as "for the sake of Christ". Calvin (1948:142) wrote as follows:

*And fill up what is wanting.* The particle *and* I understand as meaning *for*, for he assigns a reason why he is joyful in his sufferings, because he is in this thing a partner with Christ,



and nothing happier can be desired than this partnership. He also brings forward a consolation common to all the pious, that in all tribulations, especially in so far as they suffer anything for the sake of the gospel, they are partakers of the cross of Christ, that they may enjoy fellowship with him in a blessed resurrection.

One of the problems of this interpretation is that the nature of a mystical union does not explain the phrase “the things lacking in Christ's afflictions”.<sup>15</sup> Sumney (2006:667) claims that “If the person is taken into unity with Christ, then whatever is lacking in the suffering of Christ would also be lacking in the person united with Christ, so that Paul could not accomplish what is lacking in this kind of suffering. Indeed, it seems that what is lacking could not be filled until the Parousia.”

The third common interpretation of Colossians 1:24 is linked to the apocalyptic concept of the “messianic woes”. This would be the view of the vast majority of scholars, drawing on concepts from apocalyptic and apocryphal literature (Spivey, 2011:47). “Christ’s afflictions” refer to the Old Testament and Jewish background with implications of the suffering of the last days and the woes of the Messiah (O’Brian, 1982:78). In this view, the history of the world is divided into two ages: the present age and the coming age. It describes the people of God as suffering tremendous hardship when a great age of history is passed from the present age to a new age. This suffering will be a precursor to the coming of the Messiah (Wright, 1986:92). The parable of the inevitable suffering before the Messianic Age presents the idea that the pre-determined amount of God's wrath is being stored till the time of the coming judgment (Witherington III, 2007:144-145). The suffering of the last days is called the “woes of Messiah” (O’Brian, 1982:79). God has set a limit to the amount of suffering that the righteous and martyrs endure (Lohse, 1971:71). The suffering of the Messiah notion that is used in Colossians reflects Paul's understanding of the cosmic scope of the reconciliation of God, with the word lacking also reflecting cosmic terms, so that the Christ’s suffering and death are able to reconcile the universe, but it is not yet happening, so that Christ’s afflictions have not yet been completed (Dunn, 1996 :116). This therefore implicitly indicates that there is definite suffering that must be endured to bring forth the last event of history. Dunn (1998:486) says that, since believers share in Christ's sufferings, in a sense Christ's sufferings are incomplete until the last suffering

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<sup>15</sup> The scholars supporting this are Lohse (1971:690), O'Brien (1982:78) and Dunn (1996:115).

of the last Christian. This is to help the church, the body of Christ, which reflects the creation of God in the midst of suffering (Dunn, 1996:117). What this means is that Paul does not yet fully conform to the image of the Creator and sees as it should fill the lack of suffering. The character of God's people is that they continue to suffer, but God has capped the amount through the limitation of that suffering. The people of God will live in two overlapping ages. "The woes of Messiah", Christ's suffering, has already begun, and it will be completed when the end of coming age is reached, and the present evil age will pass. This viewpoint also raises some problems. Talbert (2007:201) claims that the limit that God has set for the last suffering is a time limit, not a limit of quantity. Moreover, there is no evidence that Christ's sufferings were intended to complete the number of sufferings required before the end could come. Barth & Blanke (1994:293) also specifically opposes the premise of God predetermining events and their sequence. He acknowledged the view that a measure of suffering occurs before the Parousia, but that it did not find any idea of a measure of suffering preceding the Parousia that the church could determine on behalf of individual suffering. At the time of his letter to the Colossians, Paul appears to indicate that the world was entering the time of eschatological pain, but the idea of a quota of suffering that is required to enter a new age does not fit well with a letter that does not mention the impending eschaton (Talbert, 2007:201).

The fourth important interpretation is that these afflictions are related to sufferings endured in the course of completing the apostolic mission. Talbert (2007:202) talks about two different types of suffering. One is the suffering that characterises the Christian's life, and the other is the suffering associated with the mission of the apostle. In another letter, 2 Cor. 11:23-27 Paul listed apostolic suffering as: "greater labours", "far more imprisonments", "floggings", "near death", "forty lashes minus one", "rods", "stoning, shipwreck", "danger from rivers", "danger from bandits", "danger from one's own people", "danger from Gentiles", "danger in the city", "danger in the wilderness", "danger at sea", "danger from false brothers and sisters", "in toil and hardship", "through many a sleepless nights", "hunger and thirst", "often without food", "cold and naked". In verse 28 he adds, "And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches". Paul did not see it as suffering in itself, but as a result of ministry. The term "θλίψις" used for Pauline letters indicates that it was not used for the affliction of Christ but was often used in the sufferings of those who proclaimed the gospel (MacDonald, 2000:79). The apostle Paul suffered not because of suffering itself, but because of the gospel. Michael Cahill (1992:143) writes as follows:

Sufferings accompany the task of evangelization. Paul is described as a servant of the Gospel (v. 23) and as a servant of Christ's body/the church (vv. 24-25). As a servant he fills up the word of God; as a servant he fills up the sufferings. The word of God needs to be filled up or brought to completion or term; this entails the inevitable, and therefore the necessary or required, amount of toil and sufferings on the part of preachers such as Paul... As Christ suffered in his mission, so the apostles will suffer in their turn, and as they are members of the church, his body, so they suffer as parts of Christ, and Christ suffers in them. In them, members of Christ, the body of Christ suffers what is necessary to complete.

Wright (1986:94) noted that the word *ἀνταναπληρῶ* is a compound form incorporating the preposition *ἀντι*, which indicates that Paul's suffering is a function that emphasises not only the suffering in some way on behalf of the church but actually instead of it. Paul's suffering is understood as an essential part of Christian witness and ministry. Just as Paul's suffering is related to his mission, the Church also faces inevitable suffering. This is due not simply to the nature of ministry in a broken world, but is so by virtue of the church's identity as the body of Christ (Spivey, 2011:53). Suffering is the endeavour to fulfil the mission, and Paul is suffering because of the identity of the church, the body of Christ. Bruce (1984:82-83) as explained that "the servant's identity which narrowed in scope until concentrated in Christ alone has post-resurrection broadened out again and become corporate in his people (cf. Paul and Barnabas' use of Isa. 49:6 in Acts. 13:47), and the servant's mission of bringing enlightenment to the nations is carried out by the representatives of Christ". Pokorny (1991:99) commented that it is also a mission in the full sense of the specific mission of the church to be carried out on behalf of Christ. The struggle of the Apostles in relation to the suffering of the whole church is meant to lead people into the knowledge of the mysteries of Christ. MacDonald (2000:95) understood the relationship between Paul and Christ and the Church presented in Colossians 1:24, in terms of the cultural situation. She writes as follows:

Ancient Mediterranean people viewed themselves as embedded in others such as their teachers and patrons. Therefore, it would not be inappropriate to use Paul's language to describe the relationship with the church or their common life in Paul's ministry and suffering.

The Greek word *θλίψεων* has never been used to refer to the affliction of the cross. Rather, it is used throughout the OT and NT to refer to various forms of persecution or oppression. As Schlier (1964:130-148) suggested in TDNT, it is a word used to refer to how the empire of

Egypt and Babylonia suppressed Israel, oppressed the rich and the poor, or Rome persecuted Christians. The persecution of Paul is the suffering of the church community that participates in Christ's oppression (2 Cor. 1:3-7). Paul equates his suffering with the suffering of the Messiah (Php. 3:8-11) and it is a testimony to the fact that it is ultimately the suffering of the body which is the church of Christ (Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004:229). The suffering necessary to fulfil Paul's mission involves internal suffering as well as external persecution. Wright (1986:94) writes as follows:

...all Christians will suffer for their faith in one way or another: if not outwardly, then inwardly, through the long, slow battle with temptation or sickness, the agonizing anxieties of Christian responsibilities for a family or a church (Paul knew these too: see 2 Cor. 1 and 2; 1 Thess. 2:17-3:1), the constant doubts and uncertainties which accompany the obedience of faith, and 'the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to', taken up as they are within the call to follow Christ".

Paul assigns his suffering as a whole as an important facet of his missionary work. These sufferings, as well as the mission, are corporate in nature, applying to the church, his calling, Christian identity, the church community, and the cultural elements of common life at large.

## **2.4 Chapter summary**

This section provided a summary of the background of Colossian. My discussion first addressed the structure, then the Colossians heresy and finally Paul's suffering.

First, Colossians can be read as a letter with a thoroughly logical structure. As is evident in this structure, the Hymn of Christ, the heresy of the Colossians, and the fulfilment of Paul's missionary work are at the core of Colossians. These three central subjects can be connected with Christ.

Second, the Colossians were evidently experiencing a crisis resulting from the Colossian heresy. However, as Gunter (1973:3-4) says, it is difficult to accurately identify the Colossians heresy. Examining the opinions of most scholars in four categories, Judaism, Gnosticism, Hellenism and paganism, it is possible to summarize the characteristics of the heresy as follows: firstly, the Colossian heresy could have been of Jewish origin. The text of Colossians provides some corroborative evidence: The relevant terms are "circumcision" (2:11-13), "human

tradition” (2:8, 22), the law of the Jews (2:21) and “in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath” (2:16), etc. Secondly, it could have been an ascetic issue: “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (Col. 2:21). Thirdly, the heresy could have involved mysticism as expressed in the desire to see the vision of angels serving God in heaven, and the purpose of abstinence was to travel to the mysterious heaven and receive revelation. Finally, it could have been related to syncretism: Colossae was an international city exposed to various religions and philosophies, and this mix would have affected faith. It may be hard to determine the exact identity of the Colossian heresy, but, as Moo (2008:60) points out, the essence of false teachings is “not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). They at least had the wrong knowledge of Christ and were under a misunderstanding.

Lastly, the chapter attempted to show how Paul's suffering in Colossians 1:24 could be interpreted? The interpretations of most scholars can be separated into four categories. The first interpretation is that the vicarious suffering of Christ remained open and had to be fulfilled by the apostle Paul. The second interpretation is that Paul suffered in the context of a “mystical union with Christ”. The third common interpretation is linked to the apocalyptic concept of the “messianic woes”. A fourth important interpretation is that these afflictions were related to suffering endured in the course of completing the apostolic mission. Paul's suffering may be related to accomplishing the apostolic mission, that the people of God in union with Christ suffer in fulfilling their mission.

What is clear in all these investigations is that Christ is being emphasized. Therefore, the understanding of Christ is important in the Colossians. Wright (1986:23) has stated: “It should be observed that virtually every section and sub-section in the main body of the letter could be accurately summed up with reference to Christ himself, and if they do this with full knowledge and understanding about who he is and what he has achieved, everything else will fall into place.” The central theme that penetrates the whole of Colossians is Christ.<sup>16</sup> This Christ is described as the mystery of God (Col. 1:26). This will be covered in the next chapter.

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<sup>16</sup> Thompson clearly asserts that the key theme throughout is Christ. He (2005:112) has argued as follows: “Christology is indeed the center of the letter; but without the explication of its theological, cosmological, soteriological, and anthropological correlates, there is nothing at all to explicate. That is to say, if “Christology” is the study of the person of Christ to God, the world, and the life of believers and, indeed, of all humankind. One cannot discuss the center - Christology - in isolation as is shown by the most exalted Christological statements”.

## Chapter 3:

### The Mystery of Christ and maturity

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Colossian heresy may be seen to be leaning towards Jewish mysticism or syncretism. As we have seen, one of the major problems of the Colossian heresy appears to have been a misunderstanding of Christ. The Colossian church had many difficulties due to the heresy and Paul presents the correct understanding of Christ to restore the church of Colossians in crisis (Col. 1:15-23), and he did so by describing Christ as mystery (Col. 1:26-27). Why did Paul describe Christ as mystery? To answer this question, and given the socio-rhetorical analysis explained earlier, this chapter will explore the meaning of mystery expressed as Christ through intertextual analysis. If the meaning of the mystery as used by Paul is revealed, it will reveal the roots of Judaism. In addition, we look at how the meaning of this mystery relates to Christian maturity.

### 3.1 The Mystery of Christ

Most scholars agree that mystery is a technical term in New Testament (Beal & Gladd, 2014: 29). The term μυστήριον (mystery) appears 28 times in the New Testament.<sup>17</sup> Paul uses the term “mystery” twenty times, half of which is found in Colossians and Ephesians. Moreover, it is almost certain that the characteristics of the mystery as used by Paul in Colossians were borrowed from the Old Testament and Judaism (esp. the Qumran) (Moo, 2008:155). So why does the apostle Paul connect Christ to mystery; what is the background and meaning of this term? This question can be answered by exploring the mysteries of the Old Testament book of Daniel and Paul's letters.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10; Rom. 11:25, 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:1, 7, 4:1, 13:2, 14:2, 15:51; Eph. 1:9, 3:3, 4, 9 5:32, 6:19; Col 1:26, 27, 2:2, 4:3, 4 (personal pronoun “αὐτὸ” used); 2 Th. 2:7, 1 Tim. 3:9, 16; Rev. 1:20, 10:7, 17:5, 7

<sup>18</sup> The word mystery is directly linked with Old Testament quotations or allusions. Beale (1998:220) said the following: “In these cases, at least, mystery appears in order to indicate two things: (1) that Old Testament prophecy is beginning fulfillment, and (2) that this fulfillment is unexpected from the former Old Testament vantage point. With respect to this last point, it is apparent that the various New Testament authors are exegeting Old Testament texts in the light of the Christ event and under the guidance of the Spirit, which result in new interpretative perspectives.”

### 3.1.1 Introductory understanding of mystery

The word μυστήριον (mystery) was used in various situations in the Greek world or civilization. There generally are two kinds of interpretation. One interpretation concerns mysticism in the pagan environment, and its relation to inter alia mystery cults, Gnosticism, magic and philosophy. Another interpretation concerns the use of mysticism in the Jewish context, particularly in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism (Gladd, 2008:8).

There has been an attempt to explain the word μυστήριον as used by Apostolic Paul as the influence of pagan mysticism and that Paul's letter reflects dependence on the Hellenistic environment.<sup>19</sup> A. E. Harvey is convinced that the Greek word μυστήριον is a technical term appearing in mystery cults that emerged in the Greek-speaking world. He explains that it was a dead metaphor and could be used without any religious context (Harvey, 1980:320).<sup>20</sup> So, he claims that the concept of the μυστήριον of the New Testament is from Greek philosophy and part of Greek literary style (Harvey, 1980:335).<sup>21</sup> He also claims that the biblical meaning of mystery is revealed or hidden, approached or aspired to, known or understood, but is never given.

On the other hand, G. Bornkamm, claimed that the NT use of μυστήριον differs from pagan usage as was found in mystery cults, Greek philosophy, magic and Gnosticism, and is generally in line with Jewish apocalypticism (Gladd, 2008:11-12). Raymond Brown concluded that the term μυστήριον has a good parallel in the Semitic background. Brown (1959:87) argued as follows:

We believe it no exaggeration to say that, considering the variety and currency of the concept of divine mysteries in Jewish thought, Paul and the NT writers could have written everything

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<sup>19</sup> W. Bousset (1970) traced the similarities between the words used in the New Testament and the mystery cults. Richard Reitzenstein (1978) saw the development of Greek religion and literature. Percy Gardner, H.A. Kennedy, and Alfred Loisy also observed the word mystery in the pagan environment (Gladd, 2008:10).

<sup>20</sup> The primary meaning of the word sacrifice signifies the act of immolating a live creature on an altar. However, once this is transferred or figuratively used, it explains that the primitive religious meaning almost disappears and can be used for the literal meaning and the figurative use in context.

<sup>21</sup> Taking Epictetus's philosophical teachings as an example, it is said that no mystery is given to just anyone; There is a rite of initiation to mystery, and then the initiate becomes part of a privileged society that shares the same experience. They promised knowledge only about faith, but they placed the duty of strict obligation of secrecy on their members.



they did about mystery if there had never been pagan mystery religions. Mystery was a part of the native theological equipment of the Jews who came to Christ.

Combining Brown's insights with mysteries in the Jewish context sparked a study of mysticism in Apocalypticism, the Qumran, and the New Testament (Gladd, 2008:12). Especially since the discovery of the DSS, the connection between Daniel and the concept of mystery received new attention since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gladd, 2008:18). In light of this, recently scholars have made important observations about the relationship between Daniel and wisdom in the DSS (Gladd, 2008:83). For example, according to the book of Daniel, the people of Babylon said they were wise, but were foolish. “Daniel, on the other hand, was wise because its wisdom was truly divine. Likewise, in 4Q300 1 II, 1-4 (Book of Mysteries)”, it was discovered how mystery takes on a similar role and, as in Daniel, magicians in 4Q300 did not realize the hidden wisdom of God, and that the wisdom of God defeats all human sagacity (Gladd, 2008:83). This clearly shows the theme of the book of Daniel comparing the wisdom of the Babylonians with Daniel's wisdom, or human wisdom with God's wisdom.

Not only the wisdom but also the Scrolls refer to highly eschatological and redemptive history in general; it also shows awareness of a relationship between mystery and Scripture. Gladd (2008:84) stated:

The OT was viewed as a dream or vision that had to be subsequently “decoded” or interpreted a clear Danielic notion. Understanding Scripture as mysteries implies therefore that a final (or more complete) meaning of the prophetic portions of the OT (if not the entire OT itself) is a divine secret, revealed to the Qumran community via the Teacher.

The Qumran scrolls understood OT prophetic texts as visionary material in need of an interpretation, hence, the term  $\text{רִי}$  applied the concept of dream reports to Scripture (esp. the book of Daniel).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> According to Gladd (2008:17), “*The Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* exclusively situated mystery within a Hellenistic environment, thereby marginalizing the term in Daniel. However, Raymond Brown contended that the Qumran community used the term  $\text{רִי}$  in accordance with the book of Daniel, and subsequent scholars accepted and capitalized on his insights”.



### 3.1.2 The mystery in the Book of Daniel

The Aramaic noun  $\text{ܡܝܫܬܪܝܐ}$ , which is translated as mystery in the book of Daniel, appears nine times in the book of Daniel (Dan 2:18, 19, 27-30, 47; 4:9 [4:6 MT]), and the Greek translation of Daniel's book is consistently translated into the Greek noun  $\mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  (mystery) (Gladd, 2008:20-21). This word reveals that the book of Daniel and the mystery of early Judaism served as a revelation of end-time events that were previously hidden, but which were revealed later (Beale & Gladd, 2014:43).

Bornkamm (1964: 814-815) in the TDNT said the following:

In Daniel,  $\mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  takes on for the first time a sense which is important for the further development of the word, namely, that of an eschatological mystery, a concealed intimation of divinely ordained future events whose disclosure and interpretation is reserved for God alone ( $\delta\acute{o}\ \alpha\acute{\nu}\alpha\kappa\alpha\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\pi\tau\omega\nu\ \mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\alpha$ , 2:28, 29, cf. 2:47) and for those inspired by His Spirit (4:9). God's power to reveal mysteries raises him above heathen gods.

The meaning of this mystery was indicated in 2 Daniel, and the word  $\mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  in the book of Daniel is first used in Daniel 2. Daniel 2 deals with the problem of interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This shows that the one to deliver the content of the dream is God and that it is also in the sovereignty of God to know its content. In Daniel, the main way God communicates is symbolism (dreams, writing on the wall, etc.). Not only the mode of the communication but also the content is as well (Beale & Gladd, 2014:50-51).

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed, "his spirit was troubled" and he could not sleep (2:1). He saw "a single great statue" in his dream (2:31), and "the head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay (2:32-33)". "A stone was cut out without hands" and it smashed the statue on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces (2:34). All of the giant statue was broken and became like "the chaff from the summer threshing floors", No trace of it was found by the wind, but the rock became "a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (2:35).

Daniel interpreted the dream. The king was the head of gold (2:38), and the bronze kingdom that ruled the whole earth would become the third kingdom, and the fourth kingdom would be as strong as steel, but it would be broken (39-40). The fact that the toes and feet were made of clay and iron indicated that the country would be divided, and that it was partly strong, but partly fragile (41-42). As the king saw the iron mixed with clay, this could refer to them mixing with each other in marriage but since iron does not mix with clay, they would not hold on to each other (2:43). The God of heaven, in contrast, would establish a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and “It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (2:44).

The magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans could not provide an interpretation of dreams and the contents of Nebuchadnezzar's dream before Daniel interpreted the dreams (Dan. 2:4, 7, 10-11). So, king Nebuchadnezzar ordered that all wise men of Babylon had to be destroyed (Dan. 2:12-13). When Daniel seeks mercy from God before interpreting this dream, the word *mystery* is used twice.

...so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning *this mystery*, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then *the mystery* was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven (Dan 2:18-19).

Daniel names the content and meaning of dreams a “mystery”. In Daniel 2:18 the pronoun “this” precedes the noun *mystery*. This includes the content mentioned above, the content of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the interpretation of that dream (Beale & Gladd, 2014:48). Nebuchadnezzar was given God's revelation hidden in the form of a dream and the revelation had to be accompanied with the interpretation by the servant of God (Daniel) to know the *mystery* (Beal, 1984:13-14).

Daniel 2:28 illustrates eschatological events, one of the insightful features of *mystery* (Beale & Gladd, 2014: 69): “there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days” (Dan. 2:28).<sup>23</sup> Here two

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<sup>23</sup> The eschatological event signifies an event that will happen at the end of days. In the Old Testament, this expression relates primarily to a time of distress (Deut. 4:30; 8:16; Ezek. 38:8, 16), the restoration of the Israelites

concepts are evident: God is the revealer of the mystery, and the mystery in the book of Daniel 2 is specifically related to “the latter of days”. In Daniel 2:29 it is said “what would take place in the future, what will take place” and in Daniel 2:45 “what will place in the future”, both of which also express eschatological terms very appropriately.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the content of the hidden mystery is related to the events that will happen in the latter days, and the goal of this eschatological event is to establish the Kingdom of God forever (Dan. 2:44-45).<sup>25</sup> This is to show God's supreme sovereignty, plan and wisdom for Israel through Nebuchadnezzar in the era of history (Newsom & Breed, 2014:75).

Mystery in the book of Daniel is also deeply related to wisdom. Daniel 2: 20-23 uniquely portrays God's character and the relationship between God and mystery (Beale & Gladd, 2014:50). The reason for blessing the name of God is because “wisdom and power belongs to Him” (20). Daniel 2:21-22 again explains specifically that wisdom and power come only from God, and God is also interested in revealing His wisdom, being “He who reveals the profound and hidden things” (22). In Daniel 2:23, he shifts from the third person singular to the second person.

To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, For You have given me wisdom and power; Even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, For You have made known to us the king's matter.

It is the reason why the emphasis is on God's action, which is wisdom and power, and Daniel becomes the instrument through whom God reveals his wisdom and power (Prinsloo, 1993:97). In Dan 2:23, “You have given me wisdom and power...what we requested of You...made known to us the king's matter” the concept of wisdom and revelation can be found. Daniel is obviously blessing the name of God because God is powerful, knows all things, is wise, and reveals his own wisdom.

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(Is 2:2; Jer34 23:30; 30:24; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1), and the rulers who initiate the peace and prosperity of Israel (Gen 49:1; Num 24:14).

<sup>24</sup> There are many eschatological statements in the book of Daniel: Dan. 8:17-26, 10:14 11:20, 27, 35; 12:4, 7, 9, 13, etc.

<sup>25</sup> The eschatological point of view is an important point, but at the same time Beal has insightfully pointed out an important perspective of Daniel's contemporary situation. Beal (1984:14) wrote; “Even though the primary focus of the interpretation is upon eschatological events, the interpretation is still pertinent to Daniel's contemporary situation; that is, the divine effecting of the interpretative prophecy is not totally reserved for the remote future, but there is an immediate partial application of the interpretation.”

The manifestation of God's wisdom is characterized by the term interpretation, which is used 34 times in the book of Daniel (Beale & Gladd, 2014:55). The term פִּשְׁר (interpretation) relates to Genesis 40-41. The cupbearer and the baker and Pharaoh have a dream, and Joseph delivered interpretations of their dreams. Daniel presented his interpretations to Nebuchadnezzar, like Joseph delivered interpretations of dreams (Pace, 2008:66). Therefore, the wisdom of God in the book of Daniel is deeply related to interpretation. Beale & Gladd (2014:66-67) suggested: “wisdom in Daniel is characterized by a twofold structure: Symbolic and interpretative revelation. Revelation has taken the form of dreams, writing, previous prophecy and vision.” The power of God to reveal this mystery demonstrates that God dominates this history. Therefore, history is the mystery of God, history cannot be predicted, nor can it be pointed out through skill, but only be revealed through the revelation of the God of wisdom.

In sum, the mystery in the book of Daniel is that the eschatological event that has been concealed is fully revealed and informs of the full wisdom of God. This mystery always includes content and interpretation. The vision and dream that reveal the mystery have the purpose of salvation as the gift of God, not human achievement, and the power of God to reveal this mystery (Goldingay, 1989:56). The obvious fact is that God controls history and reveals his purpose (Lucas, 2002:79). Therefore, history is the mystery of God, history cannot be predicted and divined by means of techniques; it can only be revealed as wisdom in revelation by God.

### **3.1.3 The mystery in Romans**

In Romans the word μυστήριον appears in both Rom. 11:25 and Rom. 16:25-26. Concerning mystery, Rom 11:25 reads “a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles have come in”. However, in Rom. 11:26 the first word “καὶ οὕτως” is inferential (and/so/therefore), and it is used in conjunction with “καὶ”. Therefore, the meaning of the mystery is to extend to Rom 11:26a (Kim, 2001:239): “a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so, all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:25-26a)”. In Rom. 11:33-36, this mystery is clearly claimed to be a plan of God revealed to Paul by the Spirit, and was not the result of human speculation.

However, the reason why the mystery in Romans causes difficulty is related to the order in which the salvation of Jews and Gentiles are related to their participation in the end-time kingdom (Beal & Gladd, 2014:164). In the beginning and conclusion of the book of Romans (Rom. 1:16, 2:9-10, 15:8-9), Paul clearly states that the order of salvation is a Jew first and then a Gentile. Not only Paul, but also in Matthew 10:5-6 it is said “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” and Acts 1:28 also says that “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. But in Romans 11:25-26, the order of salvation is swapped to the Gentile first, and then the Jew. Regarding this issue, a general view of the order of salvation suggests a missionary situation, in which many Gentile believers come into the church, in that the Jews reacted negatively to the gospel, but the Gentiles responded very positively (Bockmuehl, 1990:174-175). However, there is little evidence that Paul was engaged in Jewish mission, or worked for the Jewish ministry as much as for the Gentile ministry. Rather, Paul preached the gospel to the Jews on the way through different territories, used the synagogue as a useful base for Gentile mission, and has been predominantly committed to Gentile missions since the beginning of his apostolate (Kim, 2001:246). How should we answer this question?

The answer to this question, in part, depends on Paul's citation of Deuteronomy 32:21 in Romans 10:19 and his understanding of its further development in Romans 11: 13-14 (Beal & Gladd, 2014:176).<sup>26</sup> The meaning of Deuteronomy 32:21 is that God is calling Gentiles to be a part of his people in order to make Israel jealous (Wagner, 2003:191). In Deuteronomy 31-32, the expression “provoking to anger and provoking to jealousy” expresses God's feelings as a husband of Israel. Israel's adultery with other gods caused the jealousy of God and anger against them, because Israel broke the covenant relationship that God graciously and exclusively established with His people (Wagner, 2003:195). But the ultimate goal of God was not to curse Israel, who had broken the covenant, but to keep the covenant faithfully and get them to reconcile with God. This also means that God planned grace for the Gentiles. Therefore, Paul's citation of Deuteronomy 32:21 establishes an intertextual relationship between the poetic

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<sup>26</sup> This is based on the Old Testament, and it contains two stages of salvation. The first stage is the Jews, and the next are the Gentiles. The second stage is that the Gentiles occupy the majority of the salvaged people and this is what stimulates the Jewish remnant. This is a mystery.

depiction, unbelief, and redemption of Israel and his story of the Romans concerning the ultimate salvation and stumbling block in Israel (Wagner, 2003:194).

Romans 10:19 reads, “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation”; by introducing the theme of jealousy, Paul points out the problem of Israel's failure of faith, and the expansion of God's greater purpose of salvation to all people, which indicates that historical Israel is no longer the sole beneficiary (Dunn, 1998:519). Regarding this, Paul's interpretation is covered in more detail in Romans 11:11. Moo (2018:706) notes that Israel would have wanted to participate in the blessing when they saw that the Gentiles enjoyed the blessings of the Messiah first of all promised to them. Israel's jealousy is rooted in Deuteronomy 32:21.<sup>27</sup> Beal and Gladd (2014:179) explain that the plot of God's covenantal grace (restoration) is bestowed on the Gentiles first, and that this leads to Israel's jealousy and recovery is only stated in Deuteronomy.<sup>28</sup> Beal and Gladd's (2014:167-190) claim that God's covenantal grace (restoration) was being shown to the Gentiles first, and that this leads to Israel's jealousy and restoration, has the same meaning as the mystery spoken of in Romans 11:25-27 and Romans 16: 25-26.

The people of Israel were saved first, but the majority of Israel rejected the gospel of Christ, and those who accepted it were the Gentiles. So, Romans 11:11-14 claim that provoking Israel to jealousy, will lead them to salvation (restoration), that is, the order of salvation in the time of the church indicates that the Gentiles are first and then the Jew (Beal & Gladd, 2014, 184-185).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Some scholars consider that the order of salvation, the gentiles first and Jews later, cannot be established because the meaning of Deuteronomy 32:21 is not explicitly mentioned in Romans 11. However, throughout the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 29:22-30:10 presents the only possibility of establishing the type of order of restoration: Gentile first and Jewish later, and the language of “secret” and “revealed” in Deuteronomy 29:29 is vocabulary typically used in an implicit context and suggests that the “secret” is virtually synonymous with the mystery posited in LXX and Paul.

<sup>28</sup> It is said that Deuteronomy 32:21 is situated in the larger literary context of Deuteronomy 27-32. To summarize the extensive prophecies of Deuteronomy 27-32: the first concerns Israel's disobedience, hardening, and judgment. Second, the covenantal favor of God is given to the Gentiles. Third, Israel, subsequently being provoked to jealousy by such Gentile favor, finally leads to Israel's salvation.

<sup>29</sup> The mystery of Romans 16: 25-26 is mainly dealt with in Romans 11: 25-26 in relation to Gentile subjects, which is implied in Genesis 49:10 and Psalm 2. Genesis 49 and Psalm 2 tell us that when the king of Israel comes at the end of days, he will subdue all the enemies of the Gentiles. This will arise at the end of the history of ultimately completing God's eternal kingdom, arguing that mystery was “kept secret” but has now been revealed by the scriptures of the prophets (Beal & Gladd, 2014:193).

### 3.1.4 The mystery in 1 Corinthians

The Corinthian community suffered from problems due to divisions in the church (1 Cor. 1), spiritual pride (1 Cor. 5), sexual sin (1 Cor. 6), marriage between believers and non-believers (1 Cor 7), food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8), idolatry (1 Cor. 10), spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14), the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15) and money being collected (1 Cor. 16). Paul's letter is written in response to the news of the wide variety of problems that arose in the Corinthian community.<sup>30</sup>

Mystery occurs six times in 1 Corinthians, in key passages that play an important role in the purpose of the letter (Beal & Gladd, 2014:218). Mystery in Corinthians reflects the revelation of God's wisdom (1 Cor. 2:1, 7), "servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries" (1 Cor. 4:1), spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13:3; 14:12) and the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:51).

The mystery revealed in 1 Corinthians 2:1 and 7 is a paradoxical event represented in Christ's crucifixion (Beal & Gladd, 2014:218). Crucifixion is "the wisdom and power of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). So, Paul, in contrast with the wisdom of the eloquent, proclaims the message of the cross (1 Cor. 1:17-18).<sup>31</sup> The message of the cross reveals the power of God for us who are saved, and the power of God makes the wisdom of the world foolish (1 Cor. 1:18, 20). Only we can speak of God's wisdom, secret and hidden (1 Cor. 2:7), so Paul says "for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1). Beal and Gladd (2014:225) say that Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1 described how to proclaim the mystery and in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 described the nature of that wisdom.

Scholars have long noted the presence of several allusions to the book of Daniel in 1 Corinthians 1-2. Daniel 2:20-23 specifically lies behind 1 Corinthians 2: 6-16 (Beal & Gladd, 2014:227) Daniel 2:20-23, in the hymn of God's wisdom, describes the process of exposing the wisdom of God to the wise men of the world. Moreover, the revelation of God in Daniel 2: 20-23 is repeatedly mentioned in Daniel 2:27-30 and 47 in which the use of mystery in Daniel 2

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<sup>30</sup> This letter specifically addresses the practical issues of Christian behavior and the administration of the Church, but points out that the fundamental issue is the theological problem, because the social, moral, spiritual, and theological allies of the Corinthians are bound together.

<sup>31</sup> The eloquent wisdom shown in 1 Corinthians 1:17 points to the ancient Greek Roman rhetoric. According to Fee (2014:277), *sophia* is characterized by rhetoric/eloquence (or perhaps reason or logic).



is proved in common with 1 Corinthians 2:1 and 7 (Beal & Gladd, 2014:227-228).<sup>32</sup> As to the suggested reasons for using Daniel in 1 Corinthians, Gladd (2008:132) has claimed the following:

It seems that Paul employs all of these Danielic allusions as a vehicle for communicating the mystery of the cross. These Danielic allusions are significantly important for Paul's argument. The intertextuality provides the basis as to why the cross, so grand and pivotal in the process of redemptive history, remains an utter mystery to the foolish but wisdom to the wise. It may also signal the fulfillment of God's eschatological triumph over wisdom (Dan. 2:1-16; 25-30) and the beginning of his eternal reign over all earthly kingdoms (Dan. 2:44- 45).

The term "hidden" in 1 Corinthians 2:7 is a cardinal feature of the term mystery. This term can be explained by "temporary hiddenness" and "permanent hiddenness (Beal & Gladd, 2014:230): "Temporary hiddenness" is related to the hidden nature of the revelation and the eventual revelation, and "permanent hiddenness" means that only a few people can grasp the hidden and points out that the revelation is concealed, enduring or constant even after it has been revealed. Based on this understanding, the mystery of 1 Corinthians 2:7 is hidden from those who do not believe in the message of the cross, but, at the same time, those who believe in the message of the cross can realize the mystery (Cor. 2:10-16). Therefore, mystery in 1 Corinthians 1-2 is related to wisdom; the mystery is the wisdom of God to recognize the events of the cross. (1 Cor 1:21, 24, 30; 2:6) (Beal & Gladd, 2014:233).

The unique term "the Lord of glory" in 1 Corinthians 2:8 can be explained with reference to the mystery of Christ.<sup>33</sup> The term the Lord of glory does not appear at all in the NT or in the Greek translation of the OT, but appears many times in the prominent Jewish document of 1 Enoch.<sup>34</sup> By naming Christ as the Lord of glory in view of the concept of God's heavenly

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<sup>32</sup> "(1) Daniel 2 refers to a 'mystery' revealed to an evil ruler who does not fully understand the revealed interpretation (cf. 1 Cor. 2:8). (2) The interpretation of the mystery is understood by the godly prophet who receives the revelation and passes it on to others (1 Cor. 2:10-16). (3) The prophet understands the revealed mystery because God revealed it to him by his Spirit (cf. Dan. 4:9 [parallel Dan 2:20-21] and 1 Cor. 2:10-16). (4) To know this mystery is to have 'wisdom'. (5) The mystery concerns the establishment of the kingdom in the end times (for Paul's relevant end-time language, cf. 1 Cor. 2:7-8 with 1 Cor. 7:31; 10:11). (6) The emphasis on wisdom together with power, along with the comment that Daniel has received insight from God, seems to suggest that Daniel 2:20-23 is part of the Old Testament background to 1 Corinthians 2:6-16" (Beal & Gladd, 2014:228).

<sup>33</sup> Paul uses the title of Christ or Jesus Christ most often when referring to the cross (1 Cor. 1:17, 23; 2:2; 2 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 3:1; 6:12; Php. 2:8; 3:18; Col. 1:20; 2:14).

<sup>34</sup> 1 En. 11.14, 1 En. 27.3, 1 En. 27.5.



throne in Jewish apocalyptic literature, Paul has designated Christ as the most exalted divine ruler (Beal & Gladd, 2014:236-237). The title Messiah is Christ, and this title refers to the Messianic King of Israel. In light of the connection of the word Messiah to the event of Christ's crucifixion, Paul emphasizes that the Messianic king is involved in the death on the cross (1 Cor. 1:17, 23, 30; 2:2) (Beal & Gladd, 2014:239). After all, the mystery in 1 Corinthians 2 is the wisdom of God which knows that the divine Messiah, the King hanging on the cross, will die and become the Lord of glory at the same time.

Paul asked the community, "Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries" (1 Col. 4:1). Paul's identity is not established by the Corinthians but by God (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:169). The words "as servants (ὕπηρέτας) of Christ" relates to the revelation that occurred when Paul was converted and called in Damascus: "for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify (ὕπηρέτην καὶ μάρτυρα) to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you" (Acts. 26:16). Paul was convinced that the gospel of the mystery was given when he was called to be a servant of Christ (Eph. 2:3, 8; Col. 1:25, 26). Stewards of God's mysteries emphasize the responsible revelation's mediator and dispenser of the divine mysteries (Bockmuehl, 1990:166).<sup>35</sup> The two terms in "servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries" are understood as the role of the Old Testament prophets applied to Paul's actual ministry (O'Brien, 1993:2-12).<sup>36</sup> Actually, Paul explains that he, like the prophets, received God's call from the womb (Gal. 1:15-16), "when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles" (Gal. 1:15-16). Eventually, 1 Corinthians 4 uses mystery as the messenger of the revelation of God.

Mystery also appears in 1 Corinthians 13:2 and 14:2. 1 Corinthians 12-14 involves the central theme of the gift of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 13, mysteries emerge from the text emphasizing the priority of love in order to serve the community of faith. The prophecy and knowledge of the mystery in 13:2 are compared. This shows that knowledge of God's revelation is closely related to prophecy (Gladd, 2008:194). We have seen in Daniel that wisdom is a revelation that is eschatological in nature (Dan. 2:19, 22, 28). In this, the mystery of 1

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<sup>35</sup> Gladd (2008:172-175) uses the implication of Daniel 6:4 (faithfulness) and 1 Cor. 4:2 (trustworthy) to illustrate the role of the messenger of the revelation.

<sup>36</sup> "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Am. 3:7).

Corinthians 13:2 also reveals eschatological features, including God's purpose and revelation. It is important that the mystery mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14: 2 appears with tongues, and tongues and angels are connected to one another. The reason is that at least some sectors of Judaism are open to the possibility of communicating with angels in God's throne room in human heavenly language (Beal & Gladd, 2014:256). In this context, the mystery and tongues are mentioned together. Tongues do not signify communion with people, but communion with God (Garland, 2003:633). According to Fee (2014:1474), tongues are God's way of being revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit. If we understand tongues according to the revelatory nature of the mystery, it can be associated with revealing the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and that Daniel interpreted it through the wisdom of revelation by God (Gladd, 2008:205). Therefore, the mystery mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:2 and 14:2 reveals the characteristics of revelation and wisdom and eschatology in Judaism.

The word mystery occurs again in 1 Corinthians 15:51. This verse suggests a lesson that reveals the certainty of resurrection aimed at those who deny the resurrection of the body.<sup>37</sup> In 1 Corinthians 15:51, the mystery that is revealed is emphasized in connection with the changed body: "I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51). Does "changed" refer to dead people? Or does it refer to living people? Or does it point to all, both the dead and the living? According to Fee (2014:1776), "Paul's emphasis is on the necessary change that will happen to all, both the living and the dead", because the only way to overcome the barrier between the earthly body and the holy body is through change. This can be proved by 1 Corinthians 15:51 that repeats "all" twice. The first "all" points to the living and the second "all" points to both the dead and the living (Garland, 2003:743). The reason believers must be transformed (the revealed mystery) is because they received the last Adam's body as their own (1 Cor. 15:49). The view of Adamic garments is that "he views the resurrection not as a return to Adam's pre-fall state but as a transformation into an escalated, eschatological Adamic condition" (Beal & Gladd, 2014:265).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:12).

<sup>38</sup> Paul understands change here as wearing the last Adamic garments. The view that Adamic garments is usually based on two views in Jewish teaching; First, Adam was created in a glorious state, but lost the glory after the Fall. Second, the righteous should be like Adam originally because they must return to the state of original Adam (Beal & Gladd, 2014:266).

The mystery of 1 Corinthians is connected with wisdom especially related to the praise of God's wisdom in Daniel 2. This wisdom is to know that the Messiah died on the cross and was resurrected. At the same time, it emphasized the responsibility to be stewards of God's revelation of mysteries.

### 3.1.5 The mystery in Ephesians

The use of mystery in the letter to the Ephesians occurs six times at important connecting points (Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19). In response to the perplexing question raised when the early Ephesian community of the Gentiles was established, the Gentiles could belong to the end time of the people of God by union with Christ (Beal & Gladd, 2014: 299). This mystery is closely related to unity, the theme of Ephesians. According to Lincoln (1990:31), "Eph 1:9, 10; 3:3-10; and 5:32 all enfold different aspects of the one mystery of what God has done in Christ".

In order to reveal the meaning of the mystery in Ephesians 1:9, the contextual meaning of verse 8 to 10 should be considered. Mystery is described in "all wisdom and insight" (Eph. 1:8), and revealing this mystery is based on "according to his good pleasure" (Eph 1:9). So Bockmuehl (1990:199-200) has said that mystery is connected with God's will (θελήμα, 1:5, 9, 11), purpose (πρόθεσις, 1:11), counsel (βουλή, 1:11) and pleasure (εὐδοχία, 1:5, 9), and, in Eph 1:10, things in heaven and things on earth tell us that the fulfillment of God's plan is cosmic in scale and eschatological. Moreover, Ephesians 1:21 recalls Daniel 7:14, 27; the combination of the words rule and authority (Eph 1:21-22) is only found in Daniel 7:14, 27 (Beal & Gladd, 2014:312). Ephesians 1:20-21, Dan 7:13-14, 27, and Daniel 10:13, 16-21 illuminate the expansion of God's rule from earth on heaven, and show that the ruling of God even includes the future. Ephesians 1:9-10 and 21-22 explains that Christ is accomplishing this. So, Beal & Gladd (2014:303) note that "the mystery has to do with Christ overseeing a household management (or administration) of the fullness of the times that refers to the latter days" (Eph 1:10). In Ephesians 1:10, the summing up of all things in Christ (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ) is separated from the phrase "the mystery of his will" by two subordinate clauses, the first of which contains a verb (προέθετο, planned) whose meaning is often completed with an infinitive (Thielman, 2010:65). Lincoln (1990:32) observes that Eph 1:10 then refers to the summing up and bringing together of the diverse elements of the cosmos in Christ as the focal point. Therefore, the mystery's main focus in Eph 1:9 is that "Christ is the point of reintegration and restoration of

the original cosmic unity and harmony that had been lost at the fall of humanity, a fragmentation that had affected not only earthly but also the heavenly realm” (Beal & Gladd, 2014:307).

Ephesians 3:6 plays a central role in understand the meaning of Ephesians 3, “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). The Gentiles here are not only included in the community of Israel, but are also shown as equal (O’Brien, 1999:198). The Old Testament prophesies that the Gentiles will retain the same “nationalistic” tags when they become Israelites (Is. 56:3-8; 66:18-21; Zech, 14:16-19, but Paul says that there is no need to prove the covenantal markers predicted in the Old Testament (Beal & Gladd, 2014:336). This is a mystery.

In order to understand the mystery of Ephesians 3, the role of Christ in relation to the true Israel is important, because the Gentiles, along with the remaining Jewish believers, are given a way to become part of the true eschatological Israel (Beal, 2011:651). In the Old Testament, the king and the prophet represent the nation of Israel, and the father is the representative of the family. The illustration of the concept is that the last Adam, Christ, takes on the role of humankind's representative, just as Adam represents all humankind (Beal, 2011:652). The title of Jesus as Son of man and the Son of God reflects Adam and Israel. Israel is also called the firstborn (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:19) and the Messiah is prophesied to be the firstborn (Ps. 89:27), and also that the Son of man (Dan. 7:13), as the son of Adam who exercises absolute sovereignty over beasts, refers to representing the king of Israel and the end-time Israel (Beal & Gladd, 2014:338-339). Consequently, Beal says, “for the church to be the beginning of true end-time Israel is to begin to be identified with the original purposes of Adam, true humanity, which Christ has fulfilled”.

We can here infer the role of Christ, the true Israel, and Christ and Gentile relations. In this respect, “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:3). In other words, a Gentile can be true Israel without a nationalistic marker (whether that be circumcision, sabbath laws, dietary laws, etc.), simply by confirmation of identity in faith with the true Israelite, Christ (Beal & Gladd, 2014:341).

This is further demonstrated by the suggestion of the Old Testament Daniel 2:28.<sup>39</sup> Like the Ephesians' mystery is related to the establishment of the nation of Israel following the Messiah's dismissal of evil rulers at the end (Eph. 3:5, 10), so Daniel 2 is related to a worldwide kingdom that includes the Gentiles (Dan. 2:35). Therefore, the mystery of Ephesians 3 is that the Gentiles can confirm their identity in Christ without external identity markers.

The mystery of Ephesians 5:32 is based on Genesis 2:24 which explains, in the story of the creation, that a man leaves his parents and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one (marriage). This shows Christ and the church as one type, and the unity of creation and redemption (Lincoln, 1990:382). Ephesians 5 tells of the responsibility of the wife (Eph. 5:22-24) and the responsibility of the husband (Eph. 5:25, 28), and then describes the husband and wife as the union of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:22-33). According to Thielman (2005:389), it was God's mystery of gracious revelation that created a multiethnic form of church through this association. So, the mystery of Ephesians 5:32 is that man and woman are united as one body, just as Christ and the church are united.

The final mention of the mystery in Ephesians is found in Ephesians 6:19. It is expressed in the “mystery of the gospel”. It also is parallel to Colossians 4: 2-3 (Bockmuehl, 1990:205). In both Ephesians and Colossians, Paul asks for prayer so that he can preach the gospel secrets. According to Thielman (2010:434), “Paul urges his readers to defend their position in Christ against the onslaught of evil by prayer that is constant, Spirit-empowered, alert to surrounding evil, zealous in its devotion, and ecumenical in its breadth”. Because Paul had his mission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1-3, 6), and also because the mystery of this gospel is closely linked to Christ and his ministry, mystery becomes synonymous with the gospel.

This key mystery of Ephesians refers to “the all-inclusive purpose of God which has as its ultimate goal the uniting of all things in heaven and earth in Christ. At the same time, there is a more limited dimension to the mystery which focusses on Gentiles, along with Jews, being incorporated into the body of Christ and thus participating in the divine salvation” (O’Brien 1999:110).

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<sup>39</sup> “how the *mystery* was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words” (Eph. 3:3). “there is a God in heaven *who reveals mysteries, and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar* what will happen at the end of days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed were these” (Dan. 2:28).

### 3.1.6 The mystery in 2 Thessalonians

“The mystery of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 appears in relation to the eschatological situation. The false thought that the day of the Lord had already come was creating fear among Thessalonian church members, and Paul told them not to be deceived by these teachings (2 Th. 2:2). Paul argued that two events, the rebellion and the man of lawlessness had to be revealed before Christ would come (2 Th. 2:3). The lawless one is the one destined for destruction and “he opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God” (2 Th. 2:4). The rebellion refers to those who fall away from the covenant community of faith (Beal, 2003:204-206), and the lawless one refers to the Antichrist (Bruce, 1982:167). The lawless one will surely appear when God’s time comes, but now is restrained (2 Th. 2:6).<sup>40</sup>

In this context, the mystery appears in combination with the lawless one with negative meanings. The expression of the lawless one recalls Daniel 11:31, 36; 12:10 (LXX, Theodotion) (Beal & Gladd, 2014:446).<sup>41</sup>

Daniel 11:31 describes how the oppressor of the end of time come into the temple fortress of Israel and defile the sanctuary. This oppressor is elevating himself above God (Dan. 11:36). The lawless one of 2 Th 2:4 also reveals the same image. The lawless one will exalt himself over every object of worship, and this figure is not only adversarial but also raises himself up in self-exaltation over God and all the gods (Green, 2002:309). But the righteous Israelites will well discern God's work (Dan. 12:10). 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8 says that it was not happening yet, but would surely happen in the future before the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>40</sup> There are many opinions about who the entity is that restrains the activities of the lawless one. Bruce (1982:172) understands it to be the Roman Emperor, and Bockmuehl (1990:196) indicates God or an angel. Morris (1991:227) believes that it would have been obvious to the original readers, but we do not know the restraining substance or power.

<sup>41</sup> “They shall abolish the regular burnt offering and set up the abomination that makes desolate” (Dan. 11:31). “He shall exalt himself and consider himself greater than any god, and shall speak horrendous things against the God of gods” (Dan. 11:36). “Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand” (Dan. 12:10). And, “for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God” (2 Th. 2:3-4). Beal & Gladd, when quoting Daniel 13:31, 36; 12:10, considered the broader context of Daniel 11:31-12: 10.

Bockmuehl (1999:198) also described this pattern as an eschatological mystery. Beal & Gladd (2014:465) therefore say “Daniel’s prophecy will be fulfilled literally in its already-and-not-yet dimensions, but the inaugurated timing of the fulfillment and the way it begins fulfillment is initially unexpected and thus a revealed mystery”. Therefore, the mystery of the 2 Thessalonians 2:7 is that the oppressor at the end of days that Daniel prophesied is partially hidden, but Daniel's prophecy will be fulfilled and the lawless one will become manifest in detail.

### 3.1.7 The mystery in 1 Timothy

The word mystery is found in 1 Timothy 3:9 (the mystery of the faith) and in 3:16 (mystery of our religion). 1 Tim 3:9 expands on the qualifications of deacons and in text 3:16 introduces the hymn of Christ. 1 Tim 3:9 explains that, for deacons to pursue a life of dignity, “they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience”. Here the mystery indicates knowledge revealed by grace through the gospel (Mounce, 2000:199). In particular, it is hidden in God, but points to the essential truth of the gospel, especially the saving (in God) revealed by the Holy Spirit (Fee, 1988:87). Here the mystery is combined with faith in the genitive case (τῆς πίστεως). This genitive tells who the object of the mystery is (Beal & Gladd, 2014:497).<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, this expression is asking who the object of the mystery of faith is. Bockmuehl (1990:212) noted that the mystery of godliness and the mystery of faith are in fact substantially the same as Christ, the mystery of whom essentially is the gospel of Paul, in linking it with the Christian confession, the content of the mystery in this hymn. It is connected to the expression "without any doubt" of 1 Tim 3:16 in the mystery of faith in 1 Tim 3: 9. The religion's mystery of 1 Tim 3:16 specifically declares the knowledge of faith. It is expressed in six sentences contained in relative pronouns (ὅς).

ὅς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, (He was revealed in flesh)

ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι, (vindicated in spirit)

ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις, (seen by angels)

ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν, (proclaimed among Gentiles)

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<sup>42</sup> The top two candidates in the text are represented by a descriptive genitive and a genitive of reference. The content requires the use of a genitive of reference.



ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ, (believed in throughout the world)

ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ. (taken up in glory)

These six hymn lines are exclusively focused on the person of Christ (Beal & Gladd, 2014:503). The first line presents a hymn about the incarnation of Christ (John 1:14, Romans 1:3, Phil 2:7-8). Mounce (2009:227) says that “Massinger suggests that although there is grammatical irregularity in referring the masculine relative pronoun ὅς to the neuter pronoun μυστήριον, the result is a wonderful truth, namely that the mystery of godliness is Christ Himself”. This shows that the Lord Jesus Christ appears as a person. As further evidence, in line 1, “the subject of the verb ‘was revealed’ is ‘who’, the verb indirectly remains tied to the central noun mystery (μυστήριον) only two words earlier” (Beal & Gladd, 2014:509). This term is a common in the New Testament, but it was used to describe the Incarnation (Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26).

The reference to flesh and Spirit, contrasted with lines two and three, points to Christ in the resurrected body of the New creation or New Age (Beal & Gladd, 2014:521). This is represented by the type of earth (flesh) and the type of heaven (spirit) by contrasting the natural body and spiritual bodies in 1 Corinthians 15: 35-57. The term flesh is often associated with individuals identified with the old age (Rom. 8:4-5, 12-13; 2 Cor 1:17; 5:16; 10:2-3). The old age is under the influence of original Adam. However, those in the Spirit participate in the New Age (Rom. 8:1-16; Gal. 5:16-18, 22, 25). Here the mystery revelation hidden in the Old Testament is revealed. Beal & Gladd (2014:527) have said that the “Messiah would first become identified with God in a body that was identified with the old age, which would then be transformed into a new-creational, incorruptible body”. Therefore, the mystery of the hymn shows that the resurrected Christ does not exist in the earthly body but exists a new glorious body.

Lines 4 and 5 contain a reflection of the new revelation of the end. This brings to mind the images in Psalm 67 and 98 and Isaiah 49:6. God will restore his righteous remnant in Israel and give salvation to the Gentiles through his servant. However, in 1 Timothy 3:16, the focus has shifted from the act of God to Christ Himself known to all nations (Beal & Gladd, 2014:514). It shows that Christ is the Messiah to be proclaimed to all nations.



Therefore the “mystery of religion” (1 Tim. 3:16) (μυστήριον τῆς εὐσεβείας) is practically synonymous with “mystery of faith” (μυστήριον τῆς πίστεως) in 1 Tim. 3:9 (Dibelius, 1972:61). The mystery of faith is well described in the Christ hymn. It contains the core of the gospel which refers to Christ's incarnation, saving all nations and being resurrected.

### 3.1.8 The mystery in Colossians

The word mystery is used five times in Colossians.<sup>43</sup> This mystery is the eschatological fulfilment of God's plan of salvation that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ (O'Brien, 1999:109). The concept of mystery in the letter to the Colossians should also be understood on the basis of the use of mystery in Daniel (Arnold, 1996:272).<sup>44</sup> Let us look at the mystery in Colossians in particular texts and how the book of Daniel illuminates these concepts.

The first use of mystery in Colossians is in 1:26-27. The church in Colossae was suffering from the heresy involving the problem of misunderstanding Christ, as we have seen in Chapter 2. So, Paul correctly proclaims Christ in Colossians 1:15-23, and then Paul says “I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body” (Col. 1:24). Here Paul's suffering, as discussed in Chapter 2, refers to suffering endured in the course of completing the apostolic mission. Paul tells us that he was given this pain to fulfill the Word of God (Col. 1:25). After defining this mystery as the Word of God, it was hidden from “the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints” (Col. 1:26). The contents of this mystery are indicated in the claim that “to them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

Syntactically, it is difficult to ascertain what the phrase “among the Gentiles” (ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν) modifies. Does the phrase modify the infinitive “to make known” (γνωρίσαι) or the phrase “this mystery” (μυστηρίου τούτου)? If the prepositional phrase modifies “this mystery” then the emphasis falls on the significance of the mystery as it relates to “the Gentiles”. If, on the

<sup>43</sup> Col 1:26, 27, 2:2, 4:3, 4 (in 4:4 the personal pronoun αὐτὸ instead of the noun is used).

<sup>44</sup> Arnold (1996:272-273) was convinced that the mystery in Colossians was not mystery cult theology but the roots of Judaism.

other hand, it modifies “to make known”, Paul is highlighting the proclamation of the mystery “among” or “to the Gentiles”.<sup>45</sup>

We prefer the first translation, in which the significance of the mystery is revealed as it relates to the Gentiles, because in Daniel Chapter 2, which illuminates Colossians 1:27, it becomes more apparent. Beal & Gladd (2014:419-420) provide the following table.

Daniel 2 (Old Greek)	Colossians 1:26-27
<p>19 Τότε τῷ Δανιήλ ἐν ὁράματι τῆς νυκτὸς τὸ μυστήριον ἀπεκαλύφθη· καὶ εὐλόγησε τὸν Θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ Δανιήλ, καὶ εἶπεν,</p> <p>20 Εἴη τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ εὐλογημένον ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος, ὅτι ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ σύνεσις αὐτοῦ ἐστι.</p> <p>21 Καὶ αὐτὸς ἄλλοιοι καιροὺς καὶ χρόνους, καθιστᾷ βασιλεῖς, καὶ μεθιστᾷ, διδοὺς σοφίαν τοῖς σοφοῖς, καὶ φρόνησιν τοῖς εἰδόσι σύνεσιν,</p> <p>22 αὐτὸς ἀποκαλύπτει βαθέα καὶ ἀπόκρυφα, γινώσκων τὰ ἐν τῷ σκότει, καὶ τὸ φῶς μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἐστι.</p> <p>28 Ἀλλ’ ἡ ἐστὶ Θεὸς ἐν οὐρανῷ ἀποκαλύπτων μυστήρια, καὶ ἐγνώρισε τῷ βασιλεῖ Ναβουχοδονόσορ, ᾧ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν· τὸ ἐνύπνιον σου καὶ αἱ ὁράσεις τῆς κεφαλῆς σου ἐπὶ τῆς κοίτης σου, τοῦτό ἐστι,</p>	<p>26 τὸ μυστήριον τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν — νῦν δὲ ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ,</p> <p>27 οἷς ἠθέλησεν ὁ θεὸς γνωρίσαι τί τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὃ ἐστὶν Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς δόξης·</p>

The highlighted lexical combinations above are found only in Daniel 2, Ephesians 3:3, 9, and Colossians 1-2 (Beal & Gladd, 2014:420). As we have seen, Daniel focuses on the establishment of an eschatological kingdom. Ephesians and Colossians focus on the Messianic king and the mystery centered on him. Moreover, the end of the kingdom of Israel, as shown

<sup>45</sup> Moo (2008:157-158) claimed that this view depends on how we construe two phrases in this verse: “among the Gentiles” and ἐν ὑμῖν, which could be translated either “in you” or “among you.” It can be interpreted by attaching “among the Gentiles” to the verb and in translating ἐν ὑμῖν as “in you” rather than “among you”. The result is the mystery in terms of the “indwelling Christ,” a mystery that has been proclaimed “among the Gentiles. Moreover, Paul has done nothing to draw attention to the ethnic status of the Colossian Christians.

in Daniel 2 and 7, includes the concept of the Gentiles.<sup>46</sup> In addition, Colossians 2: 16-23 is parallel to Ephesians 2: 14-18. Just as Ephesians saw that the national mark of Israel was no longer valid because of Christ, the Colossians can no longer validate the law of Moses (Col. 2:16) and only confirm their identity in Christ. This mystery is hidden, but it appears to his saints (Col. 1:26). Colossians 1:27 says clearly that the fulfillment of the mystery is Christ and Jews and Gentiles are united in Christ as the mystery (Col. 2:2).

In Colossians 2: 2 the mystery of God is to realize Christ. And “in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). It can be observed that the mystery of Colossians is also connected with wisdom, just like the book of Daniel.<sup>47</sup> The imagery of “hidden all the treasures or treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3) also evokes the Jewish wisdom tradition (Prov 2:3-6) (Dunn, 1996:132).<sup>48</sup> Paul rarely uses the word treasure,<sup>49</sup> but the word nevertheless appears here because it recalls the wisdom teaching, and this serves to emphasize the value of wisdom and knowledge found in Christ, though revelation is hidden (Moo, 2008:170).

<sup>46</sup> After interpreting the dream of the giant statue that was broken “the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” in Daniel 2:35. Daniel 2, which is parallel to Daniel 7:14, reveals the image of a stone-mountain that filled all the earth. In Daniel 7:14 he says that “to him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that *all* peoples, nations, and languages should serve him”. This shows that Israel's nation at the end-time includes the Gentile.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel 2:20-23: “Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings; he gives *wisdom* to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him. To you, O God of my ancestors, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me *wisdom* and power, and have now revealed to me what we asked of you, for you have revealed to us what the king ordered.”

<sup>48</sup> Beal and Gladd (2014:432) provide the following table.

Proverbs 2:3-6	Colossians 2:2-3
<p>3 Ἐὰν γὰρ τὴν σοφίαν ἐπικαλέσῃ, καὶ τῇ συνέσει δῶς φωνὴν σου,</p> <p>4 καὶ ἐὰν ζητήσῃς αὐτὴν ὡς ἀργύριον, καὶ ὡς θησαυροὺς ἐξεραυνήσῃς αὐτήν·</p> <p>5 Τότε συνήσεις φόβον Κυρίου, καὶ ἐπίγνωσιν Θεοῦ εὐρήσεις.</p> <p>6 Ὅτι Κύριος δίδωσι σοφίαν, καὶ ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ γνῶσις καὶ σύνεσις.’</p>	<p>2 ἵνα παρακληθῶσιν αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ καὶ εἰς πᾶν πλοῦτος τῆς πληροφορίας τῆς συνέσεως, εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ,</p> <p>3 ἐν ᾧ εἰσιν πάντες οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως ἀπόκρυφοι</p>

The only places where wisdom and understanding are used together in the Septuagint are in Proverbs 2 and Colossians 2.

<sup>49</sup> Paul uses the word treasure also in 2 Cor. 4:7.

Therefore, the mystery of God in Colossians 1-2 is that Jews and Gentiles who know the mystery of the wisdom and knowledge of Christ, confirm their identity through union with Christ.

In the context of Paul's prayer for his life and ministry, the mystery of Christ is mentioned again (Col. 4:2-4). Paul, in particular, asks for prayer to open the door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ (Col. 4:3). The open door in the New Testament is used in the context of mission and represents the provision of the opportunity (O'Brien, 1982:239). Paul is now imprisoned. However, he, surprisingly, does not pray for himself or some other minister to open the door, but that there would be an open door in believers' message (Moo, 2008:322). O'Brien (1982:239) has said that "this of course also means a door for the messenger, but here the emphasis falls upon the dynamic, almost personal, character of word". This shows that God prepares the way for the message of the gospel (Moo, 2008:322). Therefore, the meaning of the open door is being given the opportunity to convey the mystery of Christ. This mystery of Christ entails that something formerly undisclosed is now disclosed in Christ and through his gospel people expand to include the Gentiles (McKnight, 2018:372).

The expression of the mystery of Christ in Colossians 4:3 is linked to Colossians 1:26-27. In this Christ plays a key role as mystery.<sup>50</sup> This mystery plays a pivotal role in the long-awaited achievement of the kingdom of God and reconstitution the kingdom of God with the Saints who have ascertained their identity in Christ (Beal & Gladd 2014:439).

The mystery of the Colossians is concealed but focused on the kingdom of God, which is unified and reconstituted in Christ, whether it related to Jews or Gentiles, as revealed God's plan. There is all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge in the mystery of Christ. Paul is in prison, but he requests for prayer that he may have an opportunity to proclaim the mystery that pertains to Christ.

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<sup>50</sup> Moo (2008:323) has said that "the focus in Colossians, in a manner wholly distinctive to this letter, is christological. The mystery, Paul said earlier, is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27) or, simply, "Christ" (2:2). These texts suggest that we should understand 'the mystery of Christ' not as 'the mystery that Christ proclaims' (taking Christou as a subjective genitive) or even 'the mystery about Christ' (objective genitive; see NLT) but 'the mystery which is Christ' (an epexegetic genitive)."

## 3.2. Maturity

We have seen in the previous section that Paul's mystery has a revelatory and eschatological character as a concept with the roots of Judaism. In particular, this mystery can be known that the concept of wisdom and the identity of Christian can be revealed only if a real union is to be made in Christ. Now we will look at how the concept of maturity in Colossians relates to mystery.

### 3.2.1 General maturity concept

Delling (1964:66-69) in the TDNT, this word τέλειον has various meanings which are found in documents outside the Bible; these meanings include “without blemish”, “perfect,” “intention”, “finished act”, “actualising”, “full-grown”, “mature”, “belonging to dedication” and “dedicated”.

In philosophy, τέλειος means faithful humanity in relation to ethical goodness. Plato points to a firm and true view, insight, a knowledge of philosophy, and the achievement that results from a true being. It is absolutely good and intrinsically good in the ethical sphere; perfection that does not require others but is not desire (Delling, 1964:69-70). In Aristotle, perfection concerns the right ethical choice. It therefore can be called τελεία only in a specific sense, and it is not absolute (Delling, 1964:70). The Stoic school emphasized that only people having all moral talents are τέλειος and that all acts of moral co-operation are τέλειος (Delling, 1964:70).

Philo understands τέλειος in relation to wisdom. The wisdom that is given to God is the perfect way to God. The law says that piety comes through perfect virtue. Ethical beauty considers only good, but the way of following in the law is the way to perfection (Delling, 1964:70-73).

What should not be forgotten is that ancient philosophy was not a mere pursuit of wisdom and the development of various intellectual concepts about reality, but a way of life (Green, 2013:137).

Ben Sira says that wisdom is needed to reach perfection (maturity). According to Ben Sira, wisdom is divided into general wisdom and special wisdom (Goering, 2009:69).<sup>51</sup> The wisdom that speaks in Ben Sira sees wisdom as a divine revelation and characterizes it in prophetic terms (Goering, 2009:71).<sup>52</sup> Special wisdom is particularly revealed to Israel and is inherited through ancient Israel tradition, especially the Torah (Goering, 2009:89). This explains that keeping the Torah by linking Torah to wisdom is the way to wisdom.<sup>53</sup> This revelation concept is associated with the concept of choice. Goering (2009:90) has said that “special wisdom is lavished upon the elect and connected to observance of the commandments”. This shows a clear distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Nonetheless, through the analysis of Sira. 1.1-10, Goering (2009:49) said that “YHWH’s possession of all wisdom means that he can dispense wisdom to whomever, and in whatever amounts, he desires”. This shows that the difference between general wisdom (given to Gentiles) and special wisdom (given to Jews) is not a qualitative difference but a quantitative difference. In the end, it is important to observe the Torah for perfection, which is a way to get wisdom.

Maturity in ancient Judaism is deeply related to perfection through ethics, the law (Torah), and wisdom. At the same time, as seen in Chapter 2, Jewish mystic customs would have linked for the mystery of God. It can be seen that revelation and wisdom were important concepts of mystery as well as of maturity. So, what is the maturity of Colossians in this situation?

### 3.2.2 Maturity in Colossians (1:28, 4:12)

ὃν ἡμεῖς καταγγέλλομεν νουθετοῦντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον καὶ διδάσκοντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ, ἵνα παραστήσωμεν πάντα ἄνθρωπον τέλειον ἐν Χριστῷ (Col. 1:28)

Colossians 1:28 is presented in the context of Paul performing his apostolic mission and Christ's plan, which is to present the people of God holy and blameless and irreproachable before God (Col. 1:22). Paul's purpose is that he may present everyone perfect in Christ. From this context, the concept of perfection emerges.

<sup>51</sup> Goering (2009:69) argues that the “general wisdom” is that the general outpouring of wisdom upon all creation amounts to a form of general revelation, and “special wisdom” indicates that the special distribution of wisdom to the elect constitutes a kind of special revelation.

<sup>52</sup> Sira. 24.33 “ἔτι διδασκαλίαν ὡς προφητεῖαν ἐκχεῶ καὶ καταλείπω αὐτὴν εἰς γενεὰς αἰώνων”

<sup>53</sup> Sira. 1.26 ἐπιθυμήσας σοφίαν διατήρησον ἐντολὰς καὶ κύριος χορηγήσει σοι αὐτὴν

As Ridderbos (1975:270) has warned,

[regarding] the concept of perfect, one must be very much on his guard against an exclusively moral interpretation and in general against the idea of a quantitative state of moral perfection flawless in all its parts. The perfection of believers refers above all to the totalitarian character of the fullness of the redemption in Christ.

Ridderbos referred to the work of Christ. *τέλειον*, in Colossians 1:28, is a difficult word to translate. It is mostly translated as “mature”, but some prefer to translate with “perfect”.<sup>54</sup> Moo (2008:161) says that both perfect and mature suggest that it cannot reveal the meaning of the Greek *τέλειον*, rather, it brings up *τέλειος*, and *τέλειος* has a similar meaning to Hebrew *תָּמִים*.<sup>55</sup> He says that *τέλειος* “connotes the quality of being so wholehearted in one’s devotion to the Lord that one can be said to be blameless in conduct” (Moo, 2008:161). Schweitzer (1982:112) has said that, although a person may have both positive and negative attributes, he may be in the complete and undivided way oriented toward God and toward Christ.

Whatever word he uses, Paul speaks about the Christ, not the moral concept. The notion of completeness associated with Christ is expressed in the maturity and adulthood of the Christian life as the working through and unfolding of the salvation given in Christ (Ridderbos, 1975: 271).<sup>56</sup>

The preaching of Paul in Colossians 1:28 aimed to establish the people of God as perfect in Christ. This maturity occurs through knowledge and wisdom. Wright (1986:97) has said that “these are not to be weighed in the scale of ordinary human intellectual ability, but are of an altogether different order”. Maturity (*τελείους*) refers to the state of a Christian who has developed by understanding the wisdom of God’s mystery (Fitzmyer, 2008:174). In 1 Corinthians 2:6, the wisdom of knowing the hidden mystery of God is maturity (*τελείους*). Maturity entails the openness of God’s mercy or Holy Spirit. A mature person is one who hears the words of God’s revelation. People are divided into maturity and immaturity according to the possession of God’s wisdom to be realized by the Holy Spirit (Fitzmyer, 2008:174-175).

<sup>54</sup> RSV; NRSV; ESV; HCSB; NET; REB translated it into “mature”, and NIV; NJB; NAB translated it into “perfect”.

<sup>55</sup> *תָּמִים* is translated five times as *τέλειος* in the LXX.

<sup>56</sup> 1 Cor 2:6; 13:10; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28; 4:12.

The goal of maturity is not perfectionism. In Philippians 3:12-15, Paul, in the presence of perfectionist Jews who observed circumcision and the law, emphasized that he has not achieved perfectionism while emphasizing his lack of perfection in the race of faith towards the goal of knowing Christ (Hansen, 2009:257-258). Moral maturity or maturity is one of several factors that positively manifest the full salvation granted in Christ. Maturity is therefore a stage of glorification with Christ in being whole (Ridderbos, 1975: 271).

Ephesians 4:13 links the spiritual maturity of believers to the church and Christ. Lincoln (1990:256) said that τέλειον has a more mature meaning than perfect, and ἀνὴρ, as used here, refers to an adult male, a fully-grown man. This explains that the church, already described as a new person in Christ, in principle, must reach maturity and completeness in Christ. The mature man here is not a reference to the individual believer but to the church (Thielman, 2010:281). However, one focus of Ephesians that should not be forgotten is that the mature person and the fullness of the church always speak about union in Christ (Lincoln, 1990:257). Here we can see that maturity and church and Christ are inseparable. All believers should no longer be infants reaching to the goal of maturity (Eph. 4:14). So, as a result, Paul contrasts human maturity and immaturity (Thielman, 2010:282). In this relationship, “the standard for believers' attainment is the mature proportions that befit the Church as the fullness of Christ” (Lincoln, 1990:257). In the end, the church has moved towards the eschatological goal of unity and maturity in Christ, but the fact that it should keep in mind is rather that “he is informing the Colossians that their pastoral labor aims at their present growth as Christians into Christofornity so they will attain maturity” (McKnight, 2018:203). The maturity referred to in Colossians 1:28 is possible in Christ. It is “not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God” (Col. 2:19). Maturity is not perfectionism. It is not maturing by the standards of morals and laws (Col. 2:16-18). Maturity is to be “yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator” (Col. 3:10).

Maturity in Colossians reveals its meaning better in the best virtue of love (Col. 3:14). The focus in Col. 3:14 is on love leading the virtuous to perfection (McKnight, 2018:325). The word “bind” (σύνδεσμος) appears in Col. 3:14. Its basic meaning is that of tied together. It also is used in the New Testament to point to the “chain” (σύνδεσμον) (Acts. 8:23) and the connecting parts of the human body (Col. 2:19). In Colossians 3:14 and the parallel verse in



Ephesians 4:3, Paul describes the Holy Spirit as a binding force that promotes unity in Christ's body. According to Moo (2008:282), the goal of Colossians is toward perfection (Col. 1:28), and this perfection will be in a new community, because it is the new self, the community, that will be brought to perfection when love binds the virtues together. Love is not only the full commandment of God, but the ultimate virtue that binds all others toward the perfection of perfection (McKnight, 2018: 325). Lohse (1971:148-149) has said that "love is understood as the bond that leads to perfection. It binds together the members of the community who live in the unity of the body of Christ and thus produces perfection in the community of the one body". But the love itself should not be equated with the concept of perfection. Rather, love should be understood as a means or a stepping stone to help the church become united in Christ in order to reach spiritual maturity.

The maturity of Colossians is not the completeness of the law and the moral concept, but the wisdom of the mystery associated with Christ in the true unity of Christ.

### **3.3. Chapter Summary**

The word mystery in Paul's letter derives from Jewish theological notions, and Paul uses it for coming to Christ. This mystery is the revelation of the eschatological God, and the wisdom of God is revealed through Christ. The root of this mystery is profoundly illuminated in the book of Daniel. The mystery in the book of Daniel indicates the wisdom of God, which had been hidden as the revelation of eschatological God, but has been fully revealed. The mystery in Romans is God's salvation and plan (Israel and the Gentiles). For Romans, where the order of salvation seems to be an issue, Deuteronomy 32:31 provides a good image of Israel returning due to jealousy. In this context, Romans presents Gentiles as first and Israel only later coming to Jesus Christ. The mystery of 1 Corinthians is the wisdom of the God who experienced the crucifixion. The mystery is in knowing that the Messiah had died on the cross and was resurrected. This is recalling Daniel's praise in Daniel 2. In addition, by applying the mystery to his ministry, Paul uses the mystery servants of Christ. In Ephesians, the mystery is that Israel and Jews are one in Christ, even without the national mark. It is a mystery that being in Christ can confirm the identity of faith. This also reminds us of the image of the world kingdom including the Gentiles in Daniel 2. In 2 Thessalonian the mystery has the form of the lawless one of the end of days. It depicts the fulfillment of the prophecy that the oppressor of the end

of days will appear as in the book of Daniel. In 1 Timothy the mystery of faith is described by focusing on the wisdom of Christ revealed by the Holy Spirit. The mystery in Colossians, of whether Jews or Gentiles is the mystery of the re-established Kingdom of God. This mystery is Christ. It reveals the treasure of all wisdom and knowledge in Christ.

This mystery is also connected with maturity, because maturity in Judaism is generally deeply related to perfection through ethics, the law, and wisdom. However, the maturity of the Colossians is anchored in the wisdom of Christ united in Christ.

Therefore, the mystery is Christ. The hidden revelation of God is revealed through Christ. God's plan is fulfilled in Christ. The mystery is that everything is united in Christ and there also is the wisdom of God hidden in Christ. This mystery of Christ's wisdom also leads Jesus followers to maturity. Maturity is not of the law or a new morality. Maturity is not perfectionism. Maturity grows through the wisdom of Christ united in Christ.

This understanding of Paul's mystery reveals the eschatological mystery predicted in the Old Testament according to the pattern of Daniel's restraint and revelation. Then, it becomes clear that Paul's understanding of the mystery is understood from a Jewish background.

## Chapter 4:

### In Christ

This chapter will deal with the prepositional phrase or formula, “in Christ”. As discussed in Chapter 3, the significance of the union “in Christ” in Colossians was revealed by examining why Christ, who occupies an important position in Colossians, is described in terms of mystery and maturity. In terms of socio-rhetorical analysis, this chapter will use the notion of sacred texture approach to discuss how the term in Christ reflects the Christian identity in Colossians. First of all, I will examine scholars who have highlighted the importance of union with Christ and then, by examining how the term in Christ is used in Colossians, I will address how the union with Christ and the identity of Christians are connected.

#### 4.1. Previous interpretations of “in Christ”

##### 4.1.1 Adolf Deissmann

According to Dunn (1998:391), Adolf Deissmann is a scholar who in the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought the formula “in Christ” to centre stage in order to establish Paul’s theology. Deissmann regards the term “in Christ” to be connected to Paul’s religious mysterious experience on the way to Damascus as accounted in Acts and calls it “Christ mysticism” (Deissmann, 1926:130–131).

Deissmann’s Christ mysticism is the “fellowship” with Christ and the “Christ-intimacy” with the living and present spiritual Christ (Deissmann, 1926:135–136).<sup>57</sup> According to him, because Christ is spirit, Paul can live in Christ and Paul in him (1926:140).

His Christ mysticism is sure to have been influenced by Hellenism and is not altogether indistinguishable from general mysticism (Deissmann, 1926:147).<sup>58</sup> Mysticism is every religious tendency that discovers the way to God directly through inner experience without the mediation of reasoning (Deissmann, 1926:149).

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<sup>57</sup> Deissmann compares it to air: “Just as the air of life, which we breathe, is ‘in’ us and fills us, and yet we at the same time live in this air and breathe it, so it is also with the Christ–intimacy of the Apostle Paul: Christ in him, he in Christ”.

<sup>58</sup> Hellenistic influences spoke of “those inspired people who were filled with their God and given power by their God”.

However, Deissmann classifies mysticism into two types which he labels “ego-centric mysticism” and “theo-centric mysticism”. Egocentric mysticism affirms union with the divine, oneness with God, loss of the human personality in God, transformation in the deity, aesthetic intoxication and denial of personality (Deissmann, 1926:150–151). Theo-centric mysticism affirms communion, sanctification of the personality through the presence of God, conformation of the human towards the divine, ethical enthusiasm, personality (Deissmann, 1926:150–151). Deissmann suggests that the second type is appropriate for Paul, and says that “Paul was not deified nor was he transformed into spirit by this communion, nor did he become Christ. But he was transformed by God, he became spiritual and he was one whom Christ possessed and a Christ-bearer” (Deissmann, 1926:152–153). Deissmann’s Christ mysticism is not only experiential, but grace is bestowed on those who share fellowship with Christ.

Christ-mysticism, which was in its origin a reaction to revealed grace and in its nature Christ-intimacy, a mysticism of fellowship, not of oneness with its object, ethical, not indifferent, but in the highest degree active— this mysticism, though centered in Christ, did not exclude the living God, but rather disclosed Him as Holy love, and secured access to His redemptive and re-creative grace (Deissmann, 1926:255–256).

#### **4.1.2 Wilhelm Bousset**

Wilhelm Bousset was a scholar who together with Deissmann brought the formula “in Christ” to centre stage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bousset (1970:153) say that the Apostle Paul’s personal piety in Christ rested on the foundation of the Kyrios faith and Kyrios cults in the Hellenistic primitive Christian community.

According to Bousset (1970:153), “Paul’s Christ piety is the intense feeling of personal belonging and of spiritual relationship with the exalted Lord”. Paul’s formula “in Christ” becomes “the supra-terrestrial power which supports and fills with its presence his whole life” (Bousset, 1970:154).

Bousset (1970:156) argues that “behind Paul’s mysticism of the ἐν Χριστῷ εἶναι, there stands the living experience of Kyrios Christos present in the worship and practical life of the community”. This is significant in the history of religion because in Paul’s letter we can see

the development of personal mysticism out of cultic mysticism (Bousset, 1970:156). For Bousset it is ultimately about the understanding of the Lord, who rules the entire Christian personal life, as a culturally present existing development of the Kyrios.

Bousset also claimed that the “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ or κύριῳ) formula and “in the Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι) expression can be used interchangeably (Bousset, 1970:160). This means that when the Holy Spirit dwells in believers, Christ also lives in them. Paul’s mysticism regarding the Holy Spirit represents the reality of the most abundant and powerful pneumatic experience in the worshiping assembly (Bousset, 1970:163). Bousset claims that according to Paul’s thought, Christian life and all benefits and expressions can be attributed to the Holy Spirit or Christ (1970:160).

According to Bousset (1970:164), Paul’s Christ mysticism is a general elevated religio-historical phenomenon and echoes personal sentiment and a fervent mystical mood. This points to the similarity between Paul’s Christ mysticism and Hellenistic religion. Greek mystery piety is not concerned with deity and the life of deity, but places great importance on deity and mystical identity (Bousset, 1970:164). The Greek mystery piety system is absolutely individualistic, eudemonistic and egoistic; “the individual mystic achieves for himself the blessed state of deification. The divine is completely absorbed into the human” (Bousset, 1970:166).

In contrast, the notion of being “in Christ” is tantamount to a new world. It means “one great surpassing, world-embracing will which is expressed in the totality of a comprehensive fellowship” (Bousset, 1970:168–169).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Bousset (1970:168 –169) says that “it means the ministering absorption of the individual will in one great surpassing, world-embracing will which is expressed in the totality of a comprehensive fellowship, the triumphant awareness of being incorporated into a power that moves from victory to victory; the victorious confidence given therewith as to the purpose and meaning of their own work – we are God’s fellow-laborers. It signifies a much stronger stressing of the ethos, the moral obligation, a deliverance of religion out of its individualistic erroneous ways into which it had gone astray with the collapse of the national religions, and thus out of weakness and aimlessness”.

### 4.1.3 Albert Schweitzer

If Deissmann and Bousset brought the formula “in Christ” to centre stage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Albert Schweitzer was their active precursor Schweitzer (1931:1) defined mysticism as follows:

We are always in presence of mysticism when we find a human being looking upon the division between earthly and super-earthly, temporal and eternal, as transcended, and feeling himself, while still externally amid the earthly and temporal, to belong to the super-earthly and eternal.

Schweitzer claims that Paul does not say that union with God is transcendental reality. Paul does not refer to “God-mysticism”, but always to “being-in-Christ” (Schweitzer, 1931:3). “Being-in-Christ” is the key to understanding Paul’s theology.

The most striking feature of Paul’s approach to mysticism is eschatology. According the eschatological point of view, the elected people do not belong to God until the end of the world and the kingdom of God (Schweitzer, 1931:12). This means that their lives are bound to the present world. Therefore, “being-in-God” is impossible for Paul, but “being-in-Christ” is possible as a stage of the coming Messianic kingdom by the coming of Christ. “Being-in-Christ” is not static participation in the spiritual presence of Christ, but a real re-experience of His death and resurrection (Schweitzer, 1931:13).

According to Schweitzer this mysticism was replaced by Hellenistic thought as the end of days was delayed, but Paul’s mysticism was attributed primarily to Judaism’s eschatology (Schweitzer, 1931:37).

Schweitzer also clearly distinguishes between Paul’s mysticism and Hellenistic mysticism. Schweitzer (1931:16) says:

Since the Hellenistic mysticism is founded on the idea of deification and the Pauline on the idea of fellowship with the divine being, it is impossible to find in the Hellenistic literature parallels for the characteristic phrase “with Christ” and “in Christ” which dominate the Pauline mysticism

Schweitzer enumerates differences between Paul's mysticism and Hellenistic mysticism. Paul did not connect predestination and mysticism in Hellenism (Schweitzer, 1931:16). Hellenism is open to all humans. According to Paul, some people possess the glory of the future through Christ by predestination. Hellenistic mysticism has immortality at the centre of its achievement, while the mysticism of Paul is centred around the restoration of the world and the destiny of those who are elected (Schweitzer, 1931:23). Hellenistic mysticism is an individual mystery religion, but Paul's mysticism is collective (Schweitzer, 1931:23). Hellenistic mysticism is based on the ancient origins of the world, while Paul's mysticism focuses on the end of the world (Schweitzer, 1931:23).

Schweitzer sees Paul's mysticism as a solution to an eschatological problem, and that eschatology always included the concept of redemption. Schweitzer (1931:115–116) says:

The original and central idea of the Pauline Mysticism is therefore that the Elect share with one another and with Christ a corporeity which is in a special way susceptible to the action of the powers of death and resurrection, and in consequence capable of acquiring the resurrection state of existence before the general resurrection of the dead takes place.

For the believer, existence is, then, union with Christ (Schweitzer, 1931:126). Therefore, Christ's mystery is a real experience, not a spiritual expression (Schweitzer, 1931:127). The "being in Christ" of Schweitzer means participation in the mystical body of Christ.

#### **4.1.4 Rudolf Bultmann**

Rudolf Bultmann, in opposition to Schweitzer's opinion, finds Paul's mysticism to originate in a gnostic myth concept (Bultmann, 1951:298). According to Bultmann (1951:298–299), "it is plausible to assume that that mystery-conception readily combined with the Gnostic myth in certain Gnostic groups organized as mystery-cults. In one such group, for example, the mystery-god Attis had coalesced with the Gnostic Redeemer-figure".

Bultmann (1951:311) also says that the state of being in union with the body of Christ through the sacrament of baptism is said to be in Christ, and as a result, the being of Christians is called into existence in Christ. Here "in Christ" is not a mystical union but primarily an ecclesiological

formula. Bultmann (1951:311) states that since the church, into which baptism incorporates the member, is the eschatological congregation, the formula “in Christ” has not only ecclesiological but at the same time eschatological meaning. For Bultmann, the term “in Christ” is not an individual mystical relationship to Christ, but the “basic determination of one’s life by the deed of salvation (or by faith) extends even to details is indicated”(Bultmann, 1951:328–329).

#### **4.1.5 E.P. Sanders**

E.P. Sanders (1977:431–523) challenges the belief that Paul’s theological centre was justification, arguing instead that it was participation in Christ.

Sanders points out that one of the problems of Schweitzer’s mysticism is the righteousness by faith, the terminology about life in the Holy Spirit, or the life that believers live in Christ does not show “internal connection”, and he argues that the term “participation” should be used instead of mysticism (Sanders, 1977:440). Of course, Sanders does not consider the Holy Spirit and Christ as separate subjects. His view is that we have the Spirit as guarantee, and salvation through participation in the Spirit or in Christ (Sanders, 1977:460). Sanders’ concept of participation is to participate in the death of Christ and to be in union with Christ. Sanders (1977:463) describes it as, “participation in the death of Christ. Just as Paul describes the state of the Christian as being in Christ, in the body of Christ, in the Spirit and the like, so he describes the means of entering that situation as dying with Christ”. Sanders’s participatory union is not a figure of speech for something else; it is, as many scholars have insisted, real (Sanders, 1977:455). In other words, belonging to Christ means to be in Christ. The word “participationist”, which is other terminology for being Christ’s, of being his servants and belonging to him, means that Christ is Lord and that Christians should serve and obey him (Sanders, 1977:462).

Sanders (1977:549) put all these aspects together as follows:

The basic insight was that the believer becomes one with Christ Jesus and that this effects a transfer of lordship and the beginning of a transformation which will be completed with the coming of the Lord. The sequence of thought, and thus the pattern of Paul’s religious thought,



is this... one participates in salvation by becoming one person with Christ, dying with him to sin and sharing the promise of his resurrection; the transformation, however, will not be completed until the Lord returns... It seems reasonable to call this way of thinking “participationist eschatology.”

#### 4.1.6 James D.G. Dunn

Dunn explains the union with Christ by categorising both the terms “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ or κύριῳ) and “with Christ” under “Christ’s participation”.<sup>60</sup> Dunn (1998:396) claims that the key phrases “in Christ”, “with Christ”, “into Christ”, “through Christ”, and “the body of Christ” all resort under this term. They thus represent a whole view of Christian identity and various aspects of everyday life (Dunn, 1998:397). The term “with Christ” does not mean to participate in the mystical, sacramental, and salvation-historical Christ, but rather simply with Christ (Dunn, 1998:401). However according to Paul, the term “with Christ” is linked with the term “in Christ”, so that it aims to express the same sense of the community of believers rooted in common experience of participation in Christ (Dunn, 1998:402–403).

Dunn (1998:397–399) states that “in Christ” in Paul’s letters can be analysed in terms of three broad categories. The first is an objective usage, which refers to the act of redemption that depends on what Christ will do in the future. Second, by subjective use, Paul speaks regularly of believers as being in Christ or in the Lord. The third is that when Paul uses the terms in Christ or in the Lord, it brings to mind in his ministry or encourages his readers to take a specific attitude or course of action.

According to Dunn (1998:400), “the heart of the motif in Christ is not merely a belief about Christ, but an experience understood as that of the risen and living Christ”. This element of Dunn’s argument is in agreement with the opinions of Deissmann and Bousset. This mystery experience of Christ is a shared experience of Christ that binds the community together. In addition, Dunn (1998:401) says that “likewise we can hardly avoid speaking of the community, a community which understood itself not only from the gospel which had called it into existence, but also from the shared experience of Christ, which bonded them as one”.

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<sup>60</sup> Dunn (1998:397) claims that the two phrases “in Christ” and “in the Lord” are not fixed or discrete concrete.

#### 4.1.7 Michael J. Gorman

Michael J. Gorman defines “in Christ” based on an implicit Trinitarianism (Gorman, 2009:4): The term “in Christ” is his shorthand for “in God”, “in Christ” and “in the Spirit”. Paul’s experience of Christ was the experience of God. Gorman (2009:4) writes:

For Paul, to be one with Christ is to be one with God; to be like Christ is to be like God; to be in Christ is to be in God. At the very least, this means that for Paul cruciformity – conformity to the crucified Christ – is really theofornity, or theosis.

Gorman opines that theosis means that humans become like God (Gorman, 2009:5). According to Gorman (2009:7), “theosis is transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ”.

As we have seen above, the term “in Christ” has a variety of functions depending on the context and has been interpreted differently by scholars. Nevertheless, the main, core concepts can be the notion that non-Christians are brought into Christ, and the relational concepts that refer to a deep relationship with Christ. And these elements are focused on revealing the identity of Christianity because it cannot deny the command to live in Christ. In the next section, we will see how Colossians used the term “in Christ”.

#### 4.2. “In Christ” in Colossians

The phrase ἐν Χριστῷ (in Christ) appears 83 times in the Pauline corpus (Dunn, 1996:396).<sup>61</sup> This phrase (ἐν Χριστῷ) has the same meaning as ἐν κυρίῳ (in the Lord).<sup>62</sup> These two phrases are never clearly separated (Dunn, 1996:396–397).

Here, the preposition ἐν is the most important but also the most ambiguous (Wallace, 1996:357, 372). BDAG (2000:326) also states that “the uses of the preposition are so many and various,

<sup>61</sup> Rom. 13; 1 Cor. 12; 2 Cor. 7; Gal. 7; Eph. 13; Phil. 10; Col. 3; 1 Th. 4; 2 Th. 2; Phm. 3; Past. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 9; 2 Cor. 2; Gal. 1; Eph. 8; Phil. 9; Col. 4; 1 Th. 3; 2 Th. 1; Phm. 2.

and oft so easily confused, that a strictly systematic treatment is impossible. It must suffice to list the main categories, which will help establish the usage in individual cases”.

According to Harris (2012:122–124), the function of ἐν is to represent a variety of concepts and relationships, such as an incorporative union, agency, mode, cause, location, sphere of reference. Campbell (2012:69–70) notes that the preposition has various functions including spatial, broadly instrumental, temporal, and personal functions. Porter (1992:159) suggests that ἐν Χριστῷ is an alternative not to be interpreted as a physical locative metaphor for the sort of corporate mystical union existing between the believer and Christ, but as a spherical usage that indicates that the believer is in the sphere of Christ’s control.

According to Turner (1965:119), we should not interpret ἐν Χριστῷ with ἐν as having instrumental meaning, a local meaning, and simply as a locative metaphor. He argues that “it is what certain theologians have termed Christification, a sharing of the *physis* or nature of Christ and adumbration of what in later theology was known as the *theosis* or deification of human nature, having as its ultimate goal the consummation”. So, Roberson (1934:589) suggests that “the only way to know the resultant meaning of ἐν is to note carefully the context. It is so simple in idea that it appears in every variety of connection”.

In general, scholars agree that when interpreting the preposition ἐν, we should take a spatial understanding into consideration first, and even when moving to figurative use of ἐν, it is agreed that a spatial understanding of figurative scenes is preferable where possible (Campbell, 2012:73). In addition to this, the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ (in Christ) may also represent a personal relatedness.

Dunn (1996:397) points out that in various contexts “in Christ” and the phrases “with Christ”, “into Christ” and “through Christ” are interchangeable and have the same meaning.<sup>63</sup>

In fact, in Colossians the words “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) appear three times. However, if you add the phrase “in him/whom” (ἐν ᾧ or ἐν αὐτῷ) as having the same meaning in Colossians 1–2, the number of phrases increase.<sup>64</sup> I will examine the functions of “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ),

<sup>63</sup> This paper will focus on “in Christ /in the Lord” (ἐν Χριστῷ/ ἐν κυρίῳ).

<sup>64</sup> This appears particularly in Col. 1:14–19 and 2:3–15.

“in the Lord” (ἐν κυρίῳ), “in whom” (ἐν ᾧ), “in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ) in Colossians and see how they relate to Christ and Christian identity.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4.2.1 The expression used to refer to a believer

“In Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) is used as an expression to describe a believer.

τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters *in Christ* in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father (Col. 1:2)

Here the word saints is directly connected with ἐν Χριστῷ. The saints in Colossians are called faithful brothers in Christ. It does not refer to the physical location of the Colossians, but to their spiritual position in Christ (Moo, 2008:77). According to Lohse (1971:7), it is “the holy people whom God has chosen for himself”. The term “in Christ” is used to denote believers.

The words “in the Lord” (ἐν κυρίῳ) is also used to denote believers.

Τὰ κατ’ ἐμὲ πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῖν Τυχικὸς ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος καὶ σύνδουλος ἐν κυρίῳ

Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant *in the Lord* (Col. 4:7)

The three descriptions listed here, brothers (fellow-Christians), a faithful minister (works for Christ) and fellow servant (belongs to the Lord, like Paul) indicate that Paul belongs not to himself but to the Lord (Wright, 1986:159). Campbell (2012:175) says that the function of “in the Lord” is used as periphrastic construction for Christians.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> If a relative pronoun refers to Christ, ἐν ᾧ is another way to say ἐν Χριστῷ, and whenever the pronoun refers to Christ, ἐν αὐτῷ is another way to say ἐν Χριστῷ (Campbell, 2012:176, 191).

<sup>66</sup> Campbell says that the ten times “in the Lord” belonging to the periphrasis that represents the believer, all show close association or personal relation (Rom. 16:8, 11, 13; 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:39; 9:2; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 1:14; Col. 4:7; Phm. 16).

#### 4.2.2 When expressing the characteristics of believers

The words “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) is used to describe believers’ characters.

ὃν ἡμεῖς καταγγέλλομεν νουθετοῦντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον καὶ διδάσκοντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐν  
πάσῃ σοφίᾳ, ἵνα παραστήσωμεν πάντα ἄνθρωπον τέλειον ἐν Χριστῷ

It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that  
we may present everyone mature *in* Christ (Col. 1:28)

According to BADG (2000:327–328), the preposition ἐν is used as a marker of close association, to designate a close personal relation as the controlling influence: under the control of, under the influence of, in close association with. So, Campbell (2012:106–107) says that “mature in Christ simply refers to a state of maturity that is determined by Christ and is under his influence”.

The relative pronoun of ἐν ᾧ is used to describe the characteristic of the redemption of believers.

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν  
*in whom* we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14)

This passage explains the concept of redemption; that we have been transferred from the power of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13). This is interpreted as a notion of sphere and it is show that believers have the characteristics of redemption.

Believers have the characteristic of being able to perceive the mystery of God.

ἐν ᾧ εἰσιν πάντες οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως ἀπόκρυφοι  
*in whom* are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3)

In this text, Paul hopes that all believers will realize the mystery of God. God’s mystery is Christ (Col. 2:2). All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Col. 2:3). O’Brien (1982:95) describes that these treasures of wisdom and knowledge are “deposited” and “stored up” in Christ. Paul wants believers to possess this knowledge and these treasures

in the person of Christ and believers have the characteristic of being able to realize Christ, the mystery of God.

The believer has the characteristic of reconciliation with Christ.

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα  
ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,  
τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,  
εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες  
εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι  
τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται  
καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων  
καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν

*for in him* all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and *in him* all things hold together (Col. 1:16–17)

O'Brien (1982:45) explains that the preposition ἐν points to Christ as the “sphere” within which the work of creation takes place. He creates and sustains everything in the realm of Christ. What this means, is that He has created and sustains everything in the sphere of Christ (Bruce, 1984:61–62). In other words, God's creative work depends on Christ, and his creation act does not happen to anything apart from Christ. These works of Christ are related to the reconciliation of all things done in Christ (Col. 1:15–23). If so, the believer in Christ has the character of reconciliation between Christ and all things.

Believers are “filled” because of their union in him.

καὶ ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, ὃς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας.

and you have come to fullness *in him*, who is the head of every ruler and authority (Col. 2:10)

According to O'Brien (1982:113), the verb tense (perfect) indicates a continuing state as a result of some prior action, and the passive voice that the readers have been filled by God, and it is in union with Christ that they already possess fullness. Wright (1986:108) states that, considering the parallel of Ephesians (1:23; 3:19), God has already begun through Christ with

his plans to fill the life of every man and woman and the life of all creatures with his love, power and richness. In Christ, and in Christ alone, God has decisively and exhaustively revealed himself, and believers in Christ can know and find it (Moo, 2008:195). Therefore, the character of the believer has a fullness only in Christ.

The believer has the character of completing the task of God.

καὶ εἶπατε Ἀρχίππῳ Βλέπε τὴν διακονίαν ἣν παρέλαβες ἐν κυρίῳ, ἵνα αὐτὴν πληροῖς.

And say to Archippus: See that you complete the task that you have received *in the Lord* (Col. 4:17).

The instance of ἐν κυρίῳ in this verse could denote three different meanings. First, it could convey specification or substance (the ministry of nature), second, it could convey the cause or reason (the ministry you have received because the Lord), and the third is as expressing agency (the ministry you received from the Lord) (Campbell, 2012:154). Here, the third meaning seems to be appropriate. McKnight (2018:398) says he received his ministry, his holy calling, in the Lord, which refers to his divine calling in Christ and for the sake of the church. Therefore, a characteristic of the believer is carrying out the task of God.

#### 4.2.3 When referring to the believers' faith

ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους  
for we have heard of your faith *in Christ Jesus* and of the love that you have for all the saints  
(Col. 1:4)

Colossians 1:4 expresses the cause of Paul's thanksgiving. Faith is mentioned first, because there is no Christian existence without it (O'Brien, 1982:11). McKnight (2018:92) says that "the expression faith in Christ Jesus could mean faithfulness in the sphere of Christ or personal faith in Jesus as the Messiah or their theological faith and soundness in the sphere of Christ". Here, "in Christ" can be used to express believers' faith.

#### 4.2.4 When referring to the believers' behaviour

Αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ὡς ἀνῆκεν ἐν κυρίῳ.

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting *in the Lord* (Col. 3:18)

Τὰ τέκνα, ὑπακούετε τοῖς γονεῦσιν κατὰ πάντα, τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty *in the Lord*. (Col. 3:20)

These verses contain the instructions for families as part of the household code. The obedience to parents' and a wife's submission are fitting and proper in the sphere in which the Christian now lives (O'Brien, 1982:225). Moo (2008:301) states that "it is this theme of what is required of those who belong to the Lord that undergirds the household behavior Paul requires in this passage". Therefore, it shows the behaviour of believers' faith through the term "in the Lord".

It represents the action of believers.

Ὡς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον, ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε, ἑρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives *in him*, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Col. 2:6–7)

According to Campbell (2012:184), the imperative "continue to live your lives in him" and the modifying participles "rooted and built up in him" are to be understood as enjoining believers to act in accordance with the teachings of Christ that they have already learned, and instructing them to live under the influence of Christ. Wright (1986:104) reminds that the term "walk", was and is literally a standard term for ethical conduct in Jewish thinking, and the emphasis is on the sort of conduct appropriate for one who claims Jesus as Lord.

#### 4.2.5 When referring to union with Christ (unity, participation)

καὶ ἐστέ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας. ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ



περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνεγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν  
 and you have come to fullness *in him*, who is the head of every ruler and authority. *In him* also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried *with him* in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Col. 2:10–12)

Harris (2012:100) sees ἐν αὐτῷ as union with Christ. It means that believers are filled with union with Christ. Col. 2:9 say that “for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”. This does not mean that the body of Christ is full of God, but that Christ shares the fullness of His deity through union with God (Campbell, 2012:181). In Col. 2:11 Paul speaks of being circumcised referring to the circumcision of Christ (ἐν ᾧ), Col. 2:12 refers to being buried with Christ (through baptism) and being raised with Christ, and Col. 2:13 speaks of being made alive with Christ. Thus, Campbell (2012:181) states that believers share in God’s participating reality through union and participation with Christ.

O’Brien (1982:114) emphasises the importance of participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in the theme of union with Christ. Here ἐν ᾧ in Christ (Col. 2:11), The circumcision is the movement of believers into the realm of Christ. Wright (1986:106) states that as a result of being with Christ through baptism, the Colossians become family of God. This is separate from the human families (and their local rulers) they belonged to before.

In Col. 2:12 ἐν ᾧ refers to Christ’s resurrection and indicates that the believer is likely to participate in his resurrection. According to Campbell (2012:197), “ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνεγέρθητε functions much the same way as the preceding phrase συνταφέντες αὐτῷ, with the dative pronoun working in conjunction with the συν- compound word to create the periphrastic sense you were raised with him”.

#### 4.2.6 When referring to the Trinity

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι

For *in him* all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Col. 1:19)

This passage represents a trinitarian relationship, in particular, the father and the son relationship. O'Brien (1982:53) describes the indwelling of God in Christ. McKnight (2018:162) says:

we ought to think less of essences transferred from Father to Son, the way one might move water from a bottle into a glass and more of the Father's fullness indwelling and interpenetrating the Son alongside the Son's indwelling and interpenetrating the father (and spirit)

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς

For *in him* the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily (Col. 2:9)

In this verse ἐν αὐτῷ also illustrates the trinitarian implications and expresses the union of God and Christ. It refers to the presence of God in Christ, real, essential, and even tangible and visible (Woodhouse, 2011:130). Wright (1986:108) says that "Christ is, uniquely, God's presence and his very self".

ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them *in it* (Col. 2:15)

Campbell (2012:190) says that this ἐν αὐτῷ likely represents instrumental meaning. This instrumental meaning also indicates a trinitarian relationship between the father and son. Col. 2:14 clearly reveals the instrumentality of the cross of Christ. O'Brien (1982:128) states that Paul indicates that, since it was God in Christ who was at work in the redemptive events, the action of the Father should not be separated from that of the Son. This has trinitarian implications.

#### 4.2.7 The metaphorical expression "in Christ"

The metaphorical expression "the body of Christ" is the dominant theological image used by Paul to describe the essence of the church (Dunn 1998:548). In general, what we call the body of Christ is the Christological mode of existence of the church as the people of God, and it entails a special bond with Christ (Ridderbos, 1975:362).

The metaphor of the body is a decisive expression of the unity of the community despite the diversity of the members (Dunn, 1998:550). The identity of the Christian congregation is not according to geographic location or political solidarity, but through a common allegiance to Christ. The Christianity community exists in mutual interdependence in Christ, expressed in a mutual responsibility one for another which manifests the grace of Christ (Dunn, 1998:551–552).

In Col. 1:18, if God's people are the new humanity, the metaphor of the human body expresses the organic and dependent relationship with Christ, as well as the interdependence among the people (Wright, 1986:78).

καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὃς ἐστιν ἀρχή,

He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything (Col. 1:18)

It is not easy to determine if the phrase “he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” refers to the church or the whole cosmos. However, it seems probable that it is the church because “the firstborn from the dead” is parallel to the phrase “the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15) (Campbell 2012:283). Moo (2008:126) equates the church with the body; the two are closely related, and it seems that they want to continue to use the imagery of the physical body to express the church and its growth. Christ is described as the head of the body, which is the church.

Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστιν ἡ ἐκκλησία,

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Col. 1:24)

The difficulty of this passage was dealt with in Chapter 2. As mentioned before, Paul's suffering may be related to accomplishing the apostolic mission which, in union with Christ's sufferings, was part of his missionary mission. All these things are for the body of Christ, the church; Paul has ministered for the church for this purpose.

καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἁφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβασζόμενον αὖξει τὴν αὖξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ.  
and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God (Col. 2:19)

This verse describes the growth of the body. The body grows from the head of Christ, and the church develops with the nourishment from God. That is, it matures with emphasis on the interconnectedness and interdependence of the body (Dunn, 1996:186). Thus, we can be in union with the head of Christ to find a vibrant, alive body that is energetic, organic and operational (Campbell 2012:287).

καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ βραβεύετω ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, εἰς ἣν καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι καὶ εὐχάριστοι γίνεσθε  
And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful (Col. 3:15).

Believers are called to the peace of Christ as one body. The peace of Christ actually depicts the existence of a person as the sphere of new human beings, and the gospel message directs them to the realm of peace and to be “in one body” in the church. In other words, the body of Christ expresses the present ruling realm of the noble Lord (Lohse, 1971:149–150).

### 4.3 The union with Christ and the life of the Christian

As we have seen in the above section, the phrase “in Christ” is never separate from the life of Christians but functions as words that contribute to expressing the identity of believers. Christ is the head of the body and supplies nourishment to the whole body (Col. 2:19). A believer is a person who is living through Christ’s power. So, the believer’s life leads to maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28). Colossians speaks of the believer’s life that must be practiced after union with Christ, setting aside the old life of evil passions, and accepting a new way of life (Col. 3:5–17).

The new way of life is Christ-like and universally applied, irrespective of race or class (Guthrie, 1990:583). Hence, Moo (2008:70) says that “believers are in Christ, the new man [sic], they themselves become the new man, a corporate entity that God is in the process of renewing so that it more and more resembles Christ himself”. Therefore, a believer’s life is a community

life, a life lived with others who also belong to Christ. In particular, Colossians emphasises the importance of Christian family life (Col. 3:18–4:1). The next section will examine the identity of believers by addressing the community of Christians in Christ and the family of Christians in Christ.

#### **4.3.1 The life of community in Christ**

That Christian identity is corporate was implicit in the phrase “in Christ” (Dunn, 1996:534).<sup>67</sup> Gorman (2001:36) says that to be “in Christ” refers not only to individual experience but to community experience.<sup>68</sup> This community, as we have seen in the mystery of Colossians, is a community in which the Gentiles and the Jews are united in Christ and the Kingdom of God is reconstituted. This community is an equal community, not a discriminating community, as described in the Ephesians mystery. There is no longer “Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free” discrimination in Christ (Col. 3:11).

The metaphorical expression of the body of Christ is an expression of the interrelatedness of believers. They were baptised by the Holy Spirit and became one body (Cor. 12:13). Dunn (1996:550) describes “the body as a vital expression of the unity of a community despite the diversity of its members”. What really proves the church to be the body of Christ, is the fact that members develop and help each other.<sup>69</sup> The church as the body of Christ demonstrates interdependent edification and cooperation (Gorman, 2001:361). Hence Pickett (1997:205) refers it as “a vision of community that bears the stamp of the crucified and risen Lord”.

Dunn (1996:563–564) sums this up by writing that “the point being that, as it is human embodiment which makes society possible, so the church is the means by which Christ makes actual tangible encounter with wider society”.

This community is expressed specifically in society by securing its identity as a community that places God’s commands first (Dunn, 1998:542). Richard B. Hays (1996:196) describes it

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<sup>67</sup> This is expressed as “the saints”, “those who love God” and “God’s elect” etc.

<sup>68</sup> Gorman says that “to be in Christ principally means to be under the influence of Christ’s power, especially the power to be conformed to him and his cross, by participation in the life of a community that acknowledges his lordship”. Believers are baptised and coexist with others (Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 9:1, Gal. 3:28; 5:6).

<sup>69</sup> “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” (Acts 2:44–45)

as follows: “the community, in its corporate life, is called to embody an alternative order that stands as a sign of God’s redemptive purposes in the world. Thus, community is not merely a concept; as the term is used here, it points to the concrete social manifestation of the people of God”.

These communities took the form of house churches. According to Gorman (2001:352):

These communities took the ostensibly innocuous form of house churches, groups that assembled in apartments and larger homes for a variety of purposes, including prayer, Scripture reading, receiving apostolic reports and letters, instruction and encouragement, participating in the Lord’s supper, eating, collecting money for the poor, and related activities.

So, Dunn (1998:673) describes that the reality of the social world and the church in Paul’s time a collection of small social groups (churches) composed of individuals and households of diverse ethnic backgrounds, religious traditions and social status.

Paul used the appellation, brothers, not as a social convention but in order to construct a new family language. Paul otherwise also speaks in the language of family (Gorman 2001:362). This is not a biological family but a fictive family (Brog and Crossan, 2009:187). However, Bartchy (1999:66–78) prefers the term “surrogate brothers and sisters” or “alternative family” rather than the term “fictive family”. This family is made up of siblings not by blood but by personal commitment (Bartchy, 1999:70). In this family there are people from all social classes who are now all one family. Bartchy (1999:70) says:

Indeed if they began to seek to outdo each other in giving each other honor rather than seeking to take it from each other, they could actually function as a family of Israel’s God, living in relations of mutual trust, practicing truth-telling and generalized reciprocity, sharing life and goods with each other, and not keeping score.

Paul moves from community's sacrificial self-surrender to the community transformation and community members that offered themselves to God and are freed from the power of this age. The newly created family is based on the social ties of the church (Hays 1996:36). According to Gorman (2001: 363):

these dimensions of the apostle's experience of the Church – new creation, confessing and worshipping, community, *ekklesia* and *polis*, body of Christ, and family – are clearly inextricably interrelated. Each aspect stresses the inevitably social, political, and countercultural nature of the Church. In large measure, the Pauline Church is a community of outcasts – social deviants, But not individualists.

That is, believers find their identity and vocation as the body of Christ in the world.

This community of believers has the maturity of faith as goal being a community whose first priority is God's command (Col. 1:28). As we have seen in the section on maturity, the community's maturity is to embody Christ who has all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), which is the mystery of God, and to resemble the image of God (Col. 3:10). As we have also seen, the term "in Christ" reminds us that the church is not only a human community, but a community in Christ. Thus, this responsibility for growth leads the community to deepen Christian devotion and seek ways to determine the future development of the community (Banks, 1995:137). Therefore, believers cannot achieve maturity of faith without a community of faith.

#### **4.3.2. Family life in Christ**

Paul, with the assurance of united life in Christ's community, proclaims the household code in Colossians. Many scholars confirm that the model of Christian household rules is the *Oikonomia* which was the ancient "household management" code (Dunn, 1998:666). The point is that in the Greco-Roman world the household was widely recognised as the foundation of the state (Lincoln, 1990:358). It was necessary to deal with the basic relationships of the household as part of the socio-political order, namely the relationship between husband and wife, father and child, and master and slave (Dunn, 1998:667). Because household management was regarded as a social and political concern in general, reversing the traditional hierarchical order of household could be viewed as a potential threat to the whole social order (Lincoln, 1990:358). In this context, the religious dimension of this situation was also crucial. Lincoln (1990:358) writes that "in Greco-Roman culture, wives, children, and slaves were expected to accept the religion of the male head of the household, the paterfamilias, and so

religious groups that attracted women and slaves were particularly seen as potentially subversive of societal stability”.

In this situation, Paul emphasised the household code and the reciprocal nature of relationships in Colossians 3:18–4:1 (Thielman, 2005:384). In other words, he emphasised the mutual obligations of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. What is important here, is that the whole of life, including all thoughts and behaviour, must be obedient in Christ. Marshall (2004:374) is of the opinion that the term “in the Lord” is a variation of the term “in Christ”, which makes the nuance of obedience to Christ more prominent. O’Brien (1982:233) also shows that these commands are given as motives for “in the Lord” (Col. 3:18, 20), and the terms “fearing the Lord” (Col. 3:22), “for the Lord” (Col. 3:23) and “the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:24) indicate that the whole life, including all thought and conduct, must be submitted to Lord Jesus Christ.

This obedience presupposes the centrality of love. Lohse (1971:156) writes that “Man’s [sic] relationships with his fellow men are the field upon which the Christian proves his obedience to the Lord insofar as he conducts his life in ‘love’”. This love is sacrificial and according to Christ’s action of love as described in the parallel passage in Eph. 5:25–33 (O’Brien, 1982:223). This love has nothing to do with that “which was troubled by the rule of sin and self-centeredness and which ended in the tyranny of Eros and the slavery of sex”. Rather, the original order of the Creator is restored to that of love (O’Brien, 1982:223).

In this respect, from the Colossians are required submission or obedience to members of the family (wives and husbands, then children and fathers, slaves and masters). This exhortation reflects the pattern of households in the Greco-Roman world. As Bird (2009:114) points out, “the Colossian household code is not a reaffirmation of the status quo of pagan ethics, nor a mandate for social revolution, rather, it concerns the authority of the Lord over the household of faith and the mutual obligations that follow from the subordination of all authority under the Lord”. According to Wright (1981:151), the expression “in the Lord” thoroughly Christianised the code by keeping the balance of duties and responsibilities of various family members in mind. Therefore, the purpose of the household code is to subject the life of Christians to the lordship of Christ within the institutions of the secular world (Dunn, 1996:245). Understanding the lordship of Christ means that a Christian has a reality with its source in Christ and a fullness



of quality that can be seen in the personal, domestic, communal, and social aspects of Christian life (Lincoln, 1981:130). In other words, it is to subject as in the relationship between the family and household, also the life of Christians to the Lordship of Christ within the institutions of the secular world (Dunn, 1996:245). The household code in Col. 3:18–41 does not speak of discrimination, but rather these passages warn us that our common life in Christ does not erase the responsibilities we have towards one another within the family and society (Moo, 2008:71). In the Christian household, as in the church, a common equality undergirds the ordering of relationships because “Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11) (Thielman, 2005:384).

#### 4.4 Chapter summary

Before examining the term “in Christ” in Colossians, we first considered scholars’ various interpretations and views. Adolf Deissmann defines the union of Christ as the mysterious experience, intimacy, and fellowship of Paul’s reaction to Damascus. Wilhelm Bousset also emphasises experience and fellowship, but for him an important concept is deification. Albert Schweitzer says that Paul’s mysticism is related to the contact between God and man. He also distinguishes between the mysticism of God and the mysticism of Christ, and the fact that Paul always speaks only of union with Christ; Paul always says “being-in-Christ”. Also, according to him, the most striking feature is eschatology. Rudolf Bultmann claims that the term “in Christ” is not a mystical union but primarily an ecclesiological formula. E.P. Sanders emphasises participation in Christ. Dunn focuses on community of believers rooted in common experience of participation in Christ. Michael Gorman emphasises *theosis*, which means that humans become like God; to be one with Christ is to be one with God; to be like Christ is to be like God; to be in Christ is to be in God.

Although the term “in Christ” is interpreted differently by scholars, believers cannot deny the imperative of living in Christian identity in union (experience, fellowship, participation etc.) with Christ. This may indicate that the term “in Christ” should be part of a Christian’s identity in this world.

In Colossians, the term “in Christ” refers to the believers, the characteristics of believers, the faith of believers, the behaviour of believers, expresses the Trinity and refers to the body of

Christ as a metaphorical expression. This confirms that the phrase “in Christ” is a manifestation of Christian identity.

Christian identity is not only individual but also communal, so it reflects a very real life. Specifically, the household code of Col. 3:18–4:1 deals with common life issues at the time. The household code in Colossians, through its function in Christ, makes it clear that in the community of Christians there is mutual respect and love, not discrimination, is central.

## Chapter 5:

### Colossians and empire

In Chapter 4 the importance of the Christian identity was highlighted by examining the function of the phrase “in Christ” in Colossians. This indicates that it is important how Christian identity was revealed in the Christian life at the time. In other words, Christian identity is directly related to the Christian life in imperial times. This raises further questions, though: If Christian identity is directly related to the Christian life, what was the situation and ideology at the time of the original reception of Colossians? In other words, what was the social background and ideology of the Colossians recipients living under Roman rule? This can reveal whether the book exhibits an anti-imperial theology or not. Therefore, in this chapter, using social and cultural texture analysis and ideological texture analysis, I will explore the background of emperor worship, its connection with the Colossae area, and the imperial language and ideology in Colossians, which is the basic background of 1<sup>st</sup>-century Roman rule.

#### 5.1 General understanding of the emperor cult

The emperor was just below the gods in the hierarchy of status and power in the Roman world. However, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the gods at times were seen as powerless, and the adoration of the emperors began to appear in religious practices and rituals (Bell, 1998:127–128). The Roman emperor was in full control of the empire, in charge of financial, military and diplomatic matters, and was responsible for protecting and maintaining the ruling power and wealth throughout the empire. Bearing the title “Father of the Fatherland” (*pater patriae*), the emperor embodied the empire’s male-dominated and male-centred structure (Carter, 2006:4).<sup>70</sup> This is contrary to the notion in Jewish and Christian conviction that God is the father of all (Diehl, 2013:44). Around the time of Paul’s mission, “the gospel of Caesar”, which had already brought salvation and peace to the whole world, had become widespread throughout the Roman cities (Horsley, 1997:3–4).

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<sup>70</sup> “All thirteen emperors whose reigns span the 1<sup>st</sup> century were males. That does not mean that women played no role. Women in the imperial households exercised considerable influence; wealthy elite women participated in business and civic leadership; and non-elite women were involved in household and village economies. But the empire remained a male dominated world” (Carter, 2006:4)

The people of Asia Minor, in particular, had long since established shrines and temples to express honour for their saviour, the Roman emperor, and regularly held festivals for their emperors in their cities (Price, 1997:57–65). Emperor worship ideas derived from the cities of Asia Minor manifested as competitive loyalty among the urban elite upper classes. This is because the important decisions of the city councils and the local people of Asia Minor cities were made by elite individuals who were dedicated to the city and were wealthy and influential (Price, 1997:55). The imperial festivals formed the essential framework of the imperial cults (Price, 1997:57).

The scale and form of the emperor cults varied, depending on the financial resources of individual patrons and the size of the community (Zanker, 1997:73). During the festivals, people from far away cities and neighbouring villages crowded to the cities where the festivals were held (Price, 1997:60). So, emperor worship was embodied in the community life of Asia Minor through public festivals (Price, 1997:49).

Together with the Roman emperor worship, the nurturing of patron-client relations was a strategic function of the particular social system and played a significant role in maintaining the order of the Roman Empire (Wallace-Hadrill, 1989:8). Jeffers (2002:127) says that “this system, in which clients owe honor and loyalty to their patrons, and patrons in turn owe protection to their clients, formed a network of relationships across the empire”. The people of the Roman Empire put the emperor in the position of supreme authority, and used this system to elevate their position and status within the hierarchy that consisted of patricians (senate), local notables, plebeians, and slaves (Chow, 1997:124). In the context of these relationships, the patron-client relation became not only an instrument of social control, but also the means of social cohesion (Horsley, 1997:91). This asymmetrical (vertical) reciprocal exchange stood diametrically opposed to the more horizontal associations and reciprocity embodied in kinship and villages (Horsley, 1997:90). Horsley (1997:11) continues:

Especially in the cities of Asia Minor imperial power relations became constituted in the images, shrines, temples, and festivals of the emperor cult. Moreover, since the provincial elite, who became imperial clients, were also the principal sponsors of the imperial cult, the political-religious institutions in which power relations were constituted were virtually inseparable from the local social-economic networks of imperial society.

These patron-client relationships indicate that cities of Asia Minor played a major role in the political, economic and cultural subordination of the Roman Empire.

The Roman society was built around (the notion of) family. Each family was not only a group of people related by blood, but also a religious unit with household gods and rituals (Bell, 1998:227). All the families of a Roman city were connected in their worship of tribal gods such as Jupiter and Juno. “Within each family the father, as priest and patriarch, had *Patria Potestas*, absolute control of the lives and affairs of his wife and children” (Bell, 1998:227).<sup>71</sup> When slaves in a household were liberated by their masters, they became freedmen or freed persons. Even if a person became a freedman or freed person, he or she remained dependent on the former owner as patron (Chow, 1997:120–121).<sup>72</sup> Hence there existed a socially unequal relationship between former master (patron) and liberated slave.

Jeffers (2002:129) explains:

Caesar Augustus took the three most powerful symbols in Roman society: the human patronage system, the Roman family, and Roman deities, and integrated the Roman view of the emperor into them. So, for example, the emperor came to be seen as the patron whose clients comprised the entire empire. He was wealthy enough to become the most generous benefactor in Roman history, thus generating widespread and genuine good will.

So all these concepts were combined with the emperor culture, and Augustus became the father of the empire (*pater patriae*), and extended his influence throughout the Roman Empire as the most generous patron in Roman. At the time, it was not unusual for people to deify the emperor because it was understood that human actions were also closely linked to divine power (Jeffers, 2002:129).

According to Price (1984:248):

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<sup>71</sup> The law allowed the father to inflict capital punishment on his wife and children or sell them into slavery (Bell, 1998:227-228).

<sup>72</sup> This means that they were neither totally free from the domination of nor equal in status to their patron, and the former master had the right to protect and act on the liberty of the freedmen.

The imperial cult, like the cults of the traditional gods, created a relationship of power between subject and ruler. It also enhanced the dominance of local elites over the populace, of cities over other cities, and of Greek over indigenous cultures. That is, the cult was a major part of the web of power that formed the fabric of society. The imperial cult stabilized the religious order of the world. The system of ritual was carefully structured; the symbolism evoked a picture of the relationship between the emperor and the gods. The ritual was also structuring; it imposed a definition of the world. The imperial cult, along with politics and diplomacy, constructed the reality of the Roman empire.

Price confirms that Roman people at the time did not separate emperor cults from power, politics, and religious societies.

The Roman Empire also used the a uniform visual language form of emperor worship as a tool to develop and spread it (Zanker, 1997:86).<sup>73</sup> For example, the theology of the Roman Empire was propagated with poems, inscriptions, coins and images, statues, altars, and structures (Crossan, 2008:61). Asia Minor's evidence indicates that Roman emperor worship was a fact of daily life for all residents (Caulley, 2011:202). Therefore, when Paul preached the gospel, it would have been difficult to avoid the direct and indirect conflicts; he would never have been able to ignore the influence of the emperor (Wright, 2000:161).

## **5.2. Relationship between the Colossae city and emperor worship**

It is still debated whether the people of Asia Minor participated in the imperial cults at the time of Paul's letters. Colin Miller (2010:322) claims that Colossians shows no evidence that several of Paul's main ministry centres had Roman emperor worship cults during his lifetime.<sup>74</sup>

Although no archaeological evidence of emperor worship has been found in the Colossae area, Price (1984:xxvii–xxv) argues that at the time there were at least 177 emperor related sites as with evidence of imperial temples, altars or priests in Asia Minor. Sebasteion at Aphrodisias had a dedicated emperor temple during Nero's reign. It is located within 100 km of Colossae and Laodicea, and was dedicated to the emperors of the dynasty of Aphrodisias and Julian

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<sup>73</sup> This emperor worship includes moral, religious, and political purposes in the age of Augustus.

<sup>74</sup> Miller (2010:321) names Paphos, Lystra, Iconium, Derbe, Colossas and Laodicea as the six Pauline cities in Asia Minor without an attested cult. Paphos and Lystra yielded no evidence of the cult in any period.

Claudius (Maier, 2005:336). In fact, in the case of Aphrodisias, it was probably a fairly small temple-town in the Hellenistic period, but became prosperous as a result of a special relationship with Rome through the connection of the local deity, Aphrodite, with the ruling Julian family (Smith, 1987:90–91). Roman emperor worship soon became standardised and uniform in all the cities in Asia Minor to enable it to spread quickly and be adaptable to any city (Zanker, 1997:78). Cities in the East and West and Asia Minor fervently sponsored and competed among themselves for the emperor worship. Crossan (2008:72) concludes that “All of Greece was a preparation for Rome, and ancient Greek tradition has been seamlessly absorbed into Roman imperial theology”.

### 5.3. Imperial languages and ideology in Colossians

The apostle Paul imitated and used echoes of the imperial cults and ideology as key words for the gospel of Jesus Christ, an anti-imperial gospel (Horsley, 1997:140). For example, Georgi (1997:148) says that Paul used the terms *euangelion* (gospel), *pistis* (faith), *dikaiosyne* (justice) and *eirene* (peace) as central concepts, evoking their associations with Roman political theology, i.e. emperor worship and imperialist ideologies. This imperial language and symbols also indicates Paul’s own Jewish apocalyptic background and view of the world (Horsley, 1997:142). The reason Paul uses this eschatological language is because “it reinforces the sense of uniqueness and cohesion of the community” (Meeks, 2003:174). According to Maier (2005:326), there were ubiquitous imperial images in the real world of the Colossians, and behind all this was the imperialist theology of reconciling the world and representing a pacification of erstwhile hostile and ethnically dispersed peoples.<sup>75</sup>

#### 5.3.1 The hymn of Christ (Col. 1:15–20)

Most scholars claim that the hymn of Christ is a component of the wisdom tradition rooted in the Jewish worldview of monotheism (Dunne, 2011:4). Dunne (2011:18) suggests that “the problems associated with primarily attributing wisdom influence to the hymn, coupled with the emphasis on the authority of Christ throughout Colossians, calls for a re-reading of the hymnic

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<sup>75</sup> For example, there were imperial images in market squares, theatres, baths, law courts, temples, households, on coins, on triumphal arches and public buildings.

material”. But some scholars point out that the emphasis on Christ’s status as the role of king in cosmology became more pronounced in the hymn (Marshall, 2004:368).

In Col. 1:13 the phrase “son of his love” uses the primary language or motif of 1 Cor. 15:24, referring to the messianic king, the seed of David, the kingdom of the Son of God (Fee, 2007:297). According to Beetham (2008:109), the designation contains and conveys strong covenantal language associated with the royal title lineage of David. This echoes the use of Psalm 110 in Col. 3:1 that Christ is at the right hand of God, which strengthens the acknowledgement that Christ is the king of David’s lineage (Dunne, 2011:13). In an imperial context, the notion that Christ is king can create tension as the ruler emperor is supposedly appointed by the gods, as the ultimate authority of the Roman empire, to rule over the empire (Maier, 2005:328).<sup>76</sup>

In addition, the imperial context provides more than a conceptual background for Paul’s theology. So Elliott (2000:25–26) says that Paul used metaphors that contrast the Roman Empire to the divine powers of God with images of religion that overthrew the imperial values of the time.<sup>77</sup>

Col. 1:15 claims that the image of invisible God is Christ. In the Roman Empire, κύριος (Christ) is a term referring to the Emperor. Elliott (2000:24) says that “Paul’s proclamation of Jesus as *kyrios*, the lord of God’s empire, relied heavily on Roman political concepts, and could easily be understood as violating the decrees of Caesar in the most blatant manner”.

The words θρόνοι (thrones), κυριότητες (dominions), ἀρχαὶ (rulers) and ἐξουσίαι (powers) that appear in v. 16 refer to the angelic realm in Jewish literature (O’Brien, 1982:45–46). These angels probably represent the highest orders of the angelic realm (Bruce, 1984:63). However, these angels, given the reference to the Colossian heresy, are hostile rather than friendly (O’Brien, 1982:46).

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<sup>76</sup> In their religious rituals, there was a belief that the appearance and status of the emperor was regarded as that of a god (Price, 1997:50). It also used glorious titles such as “the son of god”, “savior” “patron” expressing the best way to glorify the emperor (Chow, 1997:105).

<sup>77</sup> For example, Paul describes the image of “in triumph” with a Roman amphitheater scene depiction (1 Cor. 4:9–13) and a victory procession celebration of the Roman army (2 Cor. 2:14–16).



These words θρόνοι (thrones), κυριότητες (dominions), ἀρχαὶ (rulers) and ἐξουσίαι (powers) are used primarily in the metaphorical sense and may point to personal beings, a usage attested to outside Scripture (Moo, 2008:122). Wright (1986:76) notes that this language can apply to “unseen forces working in the world through pagan religion, astrology, or magic, or through the oppressive systems that enslaved or tyrannized human beings”.

The words θρόνοι (thrones), κυριότητες (dominions), ἀρχαὶ (rulers) and ἐξουσίαι (powers), in the Roman political, cultural, and religious environment, may have been closely related to which imperial cults and worship of Roman gods prevailed. According to Horsley (1997:142), these against the spiritual beings were more involved in political power as they were associated with the gods of Rome. Though θρόνοι (thrones) and κυριότητες (dominion) are spiritual beings, the Roman emperor may have used the spiritual power in the highest position for himself, considering his political power as Jupiter’s divine calling. Because in many cultures people ascribed unique qualities to the emperor, who they believed to be the son of god (Price, 1997:50).

These widespread use of the words, θρόνοι (thrones), κυριότητες (dominions), ἀρχαὶ (rulers) and ἐξουσίαι (powers) in imperial discourse, indicate that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the perception was that the Roman emperors and the Roman gods were the supreme authority of the earth and the heaven and the organisation and institution of Roman society as imperialist ideology may have been idolatrous. Hence Walsh and Keesmaat (2004:91) say that “this was an extension of the normal political, military and other use of power in daily sociocultural life”. Therefore the interpretation of the Pauline letters need to account for these words as used in the context of the Roman Empire (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004:91–92).

Wright (1986:76) also notes that “Paul’s language about supernatural power-structures needs to be demythologized, to be turned into language about international power politics or economic structures” because spiritual and earthly rulers are not clearly distinguished in Colossians. So, according to Walsh and Keesmaat (2004:91), “thrones are centralized structures of political, economic and military authority. Dominions refers to actual realms over which a ruler exercises sovereignty”.

Hence, ἀρχαὶ (rulers) and ἐξουσίαι (powers) may have also become Roman gods through Roman imperialism. According to BDAG (2000:138), the etymological meaning of ἀρχαὶ (rulers) refers to the commencement of some state of being, the first cause, the beginning, an authority figure who initiates activity or process. It may have been a Roman god, especially Jupiter, who worked through the empire worship in the city of Colossians. According to the etymological meaning, ἐξουσίαι (powers) refers the right to control or command, authority, absolute power, warrant power exercised by rulers or others in high positions by virtue of their office, ruling power, or official power (BDAG, 2000:352–353). As Price (1997:66) points out, the imperial cults were closely linked to political systems as well as to autonomous religious systems.<sup>78</sup> It is therefore highly probable that the inhabitants of Colosseum were influenced by the legitimate power of the aristocratic elite of Colossae as they were aware of the imperial cults and its gods. Crossan (2008:61) argues that “one of the most striking aspects of Roman imperial theology is its oblique and indirect way of describing or portraying the living Augustus as either Jupiter/Jove-Incarnate or Jupiter/Jove-for-Earth”.

Furthermore, in Col. 1:20 the terms ἀποκαταλλάξαι (reconcile) and εἰρηνοποιήσας (make peace) are often used to depict the interruption of hostilities and the reconciliation of hostile parties in ancient diplomatic and political contexts (Maier, 2005:329). These concepts are also used to describe the goal of the Roman Empire through Caesar’s rule (Dunne, 2011:16).<sup>79</sup> One example is the so-called *Pax Romana*, which refers to the defeat of enemies and expansion of territory with military action; peace won through military conquest (Elliott, 1997:169).<sup>80</sup> Another example is the brutality of crucifixion. As Hengel (1977:88) points out, the most important reason for using the brutality of crucifixion was for “groups whose development had to be suppressed by all possible means to safeguard law and order in the state”. From this point of view, Paul celebrates the reconciliation of all things in Col. 1:20 and commemorates the death of Jesus as making peace in a restored relationship. Maier (2005:330) says that it “exactly echo[es] imperial political language describing politically appointed legates designated with

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<sup>78</sup> Price (1997:67) writes: “the political apparatus, the administrative machine, the system of taxation are the fundamental parts of the state. The officials of the state possess political power; if their authority is questioned, they can support their power with force. If one takes this view of the efficient aspects of the state, the imperial cults will necessarily be seen simply as a response to the given phenomenon of political power. One might be tempted to say that it functioned as an accommodation of power and attempted to mystify political reality”.

<sup>79</sup> Caesar was likewise called a peacemaker and one who reconciled by pacifying his enemies.

<sup>80</sup> Another example is the brutality of crucifixion. As Hengel (1977: 88) points out, the most important reason for using the brutality of crucifixion was to subdue “groups whose development had to be suppressed by all possible means to safeguard law and order in the state”.

the task of initiating or concluding civic reconciliation between hostile parties”. Walsh and Keesmaat (2004:83) argue that imperial terms and the images of the emperor are found everywhere in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and this poem of Christ not only challenges the emperor’s preeminence, but also political structures and institutions. Therefore, instead of *Pax Romana*, Colossians declares the peace of Christ and the gospel of Christ instead of the emperor’s gospel (Miller, 2010:316).

### **5.3.2 The relationship between mystery and philosophy (2:18) and elements (2:8, 20)**

There are many similarities between Christianity and mystery religions in Paul’s preaching of Christianity to the Greco-Roman world. The word μυστήριον (mystery) is a word used when mystery cults were revealed at initiation ceremonies when secret knowledge was being revealed. The people who received this mystery thought that they could unite with their gods to overcome the miserable dreariness of underworld power and live happily (Bell, 1998:134–135). W. Burkert (1987:93) notes that “one of the main characteristics of mysteries is the *makarismos*, the praise of the blessed status of those who have seen the mysteries”. Paul used this to Christianity According to Tenney & Barabas (1969:567) in *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, the use of μυστήριον (mystery) indicates that Paul adapted some of the vocabulary of the mystery cults for a Christian purpose, and his use of the word mystery for a truth revealed but comprehended only by the initiated, is a clear reference to them.

According to Arnold's assessment (1996:105), William Ramsey and Martin Dibelius pointed out the similarities between Colossian philosophy (2:18) and the mystery of the local Apollo cult. This is “a pattern of ritual similar to that at Eleusis, there was a lower and higher stage in the mystery initiation at Claros. The lower stage was the initiation proper (μῶησις), and the higher stage was called entering (ἐμβατεύω), termed the *Epoptika* at Eleusis” (Arnold, 1996:105). In describing mystery rites, what we need to remember, is that mystery initiation should be recognised as “a special form of worship offered in the larger context of religious practice” (Burkert, 1987:10).

As discussed earlier, even if no direct archaeological evidence of the Colossae region is found, it is known that most of the same deities were worshipped in nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis,

and indeed, throughout Asia Minor.<sup>81</sup> Arnold (1996:119) evaluates Ramsay's findings that the concept of "entering" new life is expressed in a common coin type found in Asia Minor, including Laodicea and Lycum: "although the term ἐμβατεύω is not engraved on the coins, they depict the concept of entering new life by portraying a hero stepping onto a ship looking back as if he were calling others to follow".

This mysterious religious experience would have been a new experience and stimulus for the Colossians. Arnold (1996:120) explains:

If the advocates of "the philosophy" had experienced one or more forms of mystery initiation in the local cults, they had undergone a powerful experience that was life-changing. ... Certainly it would have been tempting, and natural, for them to assimilate their past experience and knowledge with the Christianity they had now received.

Perhaps the Colossian heresies may have been a result of confusion with the heresy of this mystery religion. As described in Arnold's view in Chapter 2, the heresy of Colossians may have been a syncretism of pagan folk and Jewish religion. Paul may have used the word mystery as a tool to convey the word of God to the audience in Rome, including those who attended mystery cults.

Against this situational background, the terms στοιχεῖα (the elemental; Col. 2:8, 20) and περιτομή (circumcised; Col. 3:11) are used in Colossians. Although there are many debates about what στοιχεῖα (the elemental) are, most scholars are of the opinion that it refers to spiritual beings who were considered personal and active in physical and heavenly elements (O'Brien, 1982:132). Henderson (2006:426) states that this spiritual being clearly indicates "a power that animates earthly dominion and that works in opposition to the power of God in Christ". Arnold (1996:75) claims that στοιχεῖα (the elemental) are best interpreted as evil spirits equivalent to the "principalities and powers".

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<sup>81</sup> Arnold (1996:107–108) remarks about the pagan cults at Colossae that "Our knowledge of the local cults is also enhanced by a comparatively better understanding of the cults that were active in nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis. The coins point to the presence of the worship of the following deities at Colossae: the Ephesian Artemis, the Laodicean Zeus, Artemis (the huntress), Asclepius and Hygieia, Leto, Demeter, Helios, Selene, Men, Dionysus, Athena, Nike, Tyche, Zeus, Boule, Isis, Sarapis, and the flood god of the Lycus. Undoubtedly, many other deities were worshipped there, probably including the Magna Mater (Cybele) and Attis".

The word στοιχεῖα (elemental) should be considered alongside the terms ἀρχὰς (rulers) and ἐξουσίας (authorities) in Col. 2:15 and refer back to the words θρόνοι (thrones), κυριότητες (dominions), ἀρχαὶ (rulers) and ἐξουσίαι (powers) in Col. 1:16. From the perspective of Hellenistic syncretism, the fundamental principles or heavenly bodies of the universe are depicted as personalised mythological beings (O'Brien, 1982:132). These personal beings may be explained in the light of Roman convictions. According to Armond (1996:60), explaining the context of Gal. 4: 2 and referring to the guardian, στοιχεῖα are likely to be personal, just as guardians were personal.

So, who is the personal being referred to in Colossians? It may be the emperor. The priests of the imperial order used the word mystery in reference to sacred rites that usually resulted in a revelation of the image of the emperor (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004:230). To reverse this image, Paul spoke of the reconciliation of Christ, not the image of a tyrant, of sovereignty over violence and oppression (Col. 1:15–20).

In this context, the words may be contrary to the imperial ideology that justified the rule of the Roman Empire. This is because the unity of the Roman Empire unified cosmic model and political harmony, reflecting the reconciliation of the universe under the power of Jupiter, who defeated fundamental chaos and hostile forces. This was the ideology of Sebasteion (Maier, 2005:336–337). Colossians, on the other hand, seeks the life of heaven, not life under the rule of the elements (Col. 2:20; 3:1).

### **5.3.3 Unity and the image of body and baptismal formula (3:11)**

The Roman Empire needed a symbol for the unity of empire. The political language term used by the Roman Empire to rule the world and to emphasise unity, was body (Gordon, 1997:129). The emperor, the head of the Roman Empire, functioned to direct and supervise all bodies of the Roman Empire. Seneca says that Empire is the soul of the state and state of body (Gordon, 1997:129). What this means, is that the power and authority of the Emperor was the driving force for the cohesion of the Roman Empire. As one example, the traditional religious festivals of the cities and festivals for Roman emperor worship created a sense of unity in communities, uniting citizens (Gordon, 1997:135). Another is the statues of Claudius as Jupiter which displayed a type of body suitable for a Roman ruler; the symbolic representation of the head

and body can be understood as having divine language and iconography and alluding to divinity (Stewart, 2003:51). Canavan (2012:120) explains:

Identity is thus commonly linked to the head yet there are significant alignments of identity to be made when the body remains constant for changing heads such as emperors of the Roman empire. The changed head for the succession of a Roman emperor allows for the values of the empire to be continued as a body under a new head.

Ultimately the unity of the Roman Empire was used by the elite in their religious rituals and politics to maintain their vested interest and dominance (Gordon, 1997:137).

Images of the body appear in Col. 1:18, 24; 2:19. As discussed in Chapter 4, the image of the body indicates unity and maturity as well as interdependence, and also represents a community identity. This may be to bring home a message that counters the empire's message: the emperor is not the head, but Christ is the head of the church (Col. 1:18), the empire is not the body, but the church is the body (Col. 1:24), and it is not the union of the emperor's power and authority, but the union in Christ from which believers grow and receive nourishment and strength from God (Col. 2:19). The contrast between Christ and the emperor is made more evident by using the peace of Christ as opposed to *Pax Romana* (Col. 3:15).

Furthermore, the concept of a community that transcends all racial boundaries, in this imperialist context of the Romans who believed that the conquest of the Scythian (Col. 3:11) was the conquest of the world, has to do with the Roman Empire (Maier, 2005:340). "Cosmopolitanism with power", which was aimed at the unity of multi-ethnic groups by means of power, was an imperial vision, and "a trans-ethnic unity" was connected with Augustus' *Res gestae*, which celebrated the fulfillment of the vision that Alexander had left incomplete (Maier, 2005:341).

The Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, a temple in the Colossae region, portrays the various stages of assimilation of the Roman imperial "moral" order, as well as a broad representation of pacified peoples (Maier, 2005:342). Amongst the statues are personifications of subjected barbarian peoples (Maier, 2005:343). This is an image of the pagan peoples who were subjugated by Rome in the process of restructuring the world order by divine command. The Romans

regarded Central and South Asia, the scene of the Scythians' activity, as the end of the world, and regarded the land as "extreme otherness, remoteness, intractability" (Maier, 2005:342–343). The inhabitants of the land, Scythians, were also despised and regarded as outlaws and immoral people. Maier (2005:343) describes the situation as follows:

these representations erected by local elites to celebrate imperial rule put in stone what was theorized by Roman moralists in print that Rome's dominion over subject nations was a consequence of its moral superiority and was the sign of a divine favour extending throughout the world, to bring order where chaos had once ruled, and peace where there had been war.

Thus, the marvelous unity of the Roman Empire can be explained by the revival of the Roman religion and the restoration of traditional moral values and it substituted political processes in a reconfiguration of Roman power relations (Horsley, 1997:13).

Col. 3:11 states that through Christ all people (Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free) are one. Col. 3:11, along with 1 Cor. 12:13 and Gal. 2:26–28, is known as a baptismal ordinance. There are similarities and differences in the passages, but all insist on the unity in Christ which is grounded in baptism (Lohse, 1971:143). In particular, Col. 3:11 mentions the Scythian, which is not found in the other passages. It is likely that Paul was showing that true unity is in Christ, as opposed to the empire's "cosmopolitanism with power" and "a trans-ethnic unity". Walsh and Keesmaat (2004:172) agree that "if the problem with the empire was that it imposed religious, ethnic, cultural and economic divisiveness and marginalization, then the alternative of the kingdom is a community in which Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:11)". Thus, Paul's barbarian and Scythian reference may be to assert the unity of all people in Christ's reign against the Roman cosmopolitanism at the time.

### **5.3.4 Maturity and the image of clothing (Col. 3: 8–14)**

The systematic image of clothes conveying the values of Roman and Greek virtues was reflected in the existing culture of Asia Minor at the time. In ancient writings, clothes represent social status (Bell, 1998:209). By the time Augustus became emperor, there were three legal groups of Rome citizens: the senatorial class, the equestrian class and the plebeians. This was indicated by their entitlement to wear purple stripes – senatorial stripes were broad, equestrian



stripes were narrow, and plebeians were not entitled to wear purple; it was the exclusive colour of the rich (cf. Luke 16:19) (Bell, 1998:187).<sup>82</sup>

During the time of the Roman Empire, the most important of the traditional virtues was *pietas* in the gods of Roman culture (Horsley, 1997:16). The term means that a statesman-*auctoritas* became “a guarantor of the trust that must be operative at all levels of the *res publica*” (Galinsky, 1998:15). Augustus was the wealthiest man and the greatest benefactor in Roman history (Horsley, 1997:15). And he called for a moral renewal of traditional values and virtues (Galinsky, 1998:20). Therefore, the term *auctoritas*, given to Augustus, is understood to be a supreme spiritual leader who goes beyond the political, intellectual and overriding moral authority.

It is naturally connected to emperor culture. Clothing was especially of vital importance to the self-construction of the identity of Roman emperors. Identity was generally linked to the head, however, the changed head for the succession of a Roman emperor allowed for the values of the empire to be continued as a body under a new head, and a Roman emperor would have accompanied this with certain clothing to convey this meaning (Canavan, 2012:120). The visible replicas of the emperors, clothed in Roman virtue, was the model of identity for citizens and people (Canavan, 2012:67). Canavan (2012:68) notes that:

The clothing of the Roman emperor communicated his authority and power and epitomized the virtues of *virtus*, *dignitas*, *humanitas*, *gravitas* and *pietas*. These virtues came together in the emperor displaying:

*virtus* as the epitome of manliness, the virtue of courage, excellence and valour;  
*dignitas* as the visual distinctiveness of status and worth;  
*humanitas* as the virtue of humanity as a state of civilization as against being barbarian;  
*gravitas* as responsibility and attendance to the matters at hand;  
*pietas* as the sense of duty not only to the gods but to the natural, social, political and religious order.

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<sup>82</sup> The dyers of Colossae and Hierapolis produced some of the most sought-after purple cloth in Asia Minor (Yamauchi, 1980:157).



This shows that, based on virtue, clothing as self-construction of the identity of Roman emperors, was part of their visibility, communicating their identity and the power of Rome.

But the image of clothes in Colossians is not an extension of the emperor's identity and power on the basis of virtue, but of maturity in Christ on the basis of love and virtue. In Colossians, clothing imagery includes ἀποτίθημι (to lay aside or put off) (Col. 3:8), ἀπεκδύομαι (stripped off or put off) (Col. 3:9) and ἐνδύω (to clothe) (Col. 3:10, 12 and inferred in 14 ). The image of clothing here implies that the followers of Christ are rid of all things (anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language) (Col. 3:8) and stripped of the old self with its practices (Col. 3:9), clothing themselves with the new self and renewed in knowledge according to the image of the creator (Col. 3:10). In the context of maturity, clothing is a love-based Christian identity of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and long-suffering (Col. 3:12–14). Maier (2016:195) says that “in Col 3:15, he represents these virtues imperially by exhorting the audience to let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts”.<sup>83</sup>

This is intimately related to Paul's mission, as found in τέλειον (mature) in Col. 1:28. The metaphor of clothes serves as a belt that bonds all the virtues in the same way as love (Sumney, 2008:218). This relies on the translation of σύνδεσμος as belt. The word σύνδεσμος also occurs in Col. 2:19 and is described as ligaments. As discussed in Chapter 4, Col. 2:19 emphasises the Christian life in the unity of Christ. In other words, the identity of the Christian community leads to maturity (τέλειον) and the mission of Christ (Col. 1:28). Canavan (2012:154–155) elaborates:

As σύνδεσμος is also used in Col 2:19 to denote ligaments, the sense of fastening appears more in congruence with this, offering a connection to body in light of the construction of identity that is inferred in clothing the body of Christ... This would draw an analogy of love as the fastening (σύνδεσμος) of maturity (τέλειον ) with the ligaments (σύνδεσμος) that hold the body together as one. More profoundly, the use of τέλειοτης here is linked to Paul's mission in Col 1:28 to present everyone mature (τέλειον) in Christ.

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<sup>83</sup> “The peace the author promotes is the ethical expression of virtue that reflects the civilizing rule of Christ” (Maier, 2016:195).

The maturity of Colossians is a virtue based on love in union with Christ. This rule expresses itself in a new moral order. In the imperial context, where military pacification expressed the divinely appointed right of Rome to rule and the advent of good morals, Colossians were instructed to truly unite with Christ and to mature with the wisdom and knowledge of Christ.

### 5.3.5 Household code

The household of Colossians had tensions and conflicts with the political and economic environment of patriarchal customs. In the Christian situation at the time, this self-understanding in the house church, the public-religious and private patriarchal spheres, were not clearly separated institutionally (Fiorenza, 1997:234). That is, in the guidelines of ancient family life, the state's well-being, the religious observance of the laws, and the customs of the patriarchal family were intertwined (Fiorenza, 1997:241).<sup>84</sup> In particular, Augustus accepted the *pater patria* title given to him, and regarded the whole empire as a great *familia* with the emperor as the head of the family functioning as a *pater familias*, and demanding *pietas* from Roman citizens (D'Angelo, 2003:142).<sup>85</sup>

For example, as Albert Harrill (2006:23) points out, Rome's hierarchical society was personalised by power, and this was integral to the empire. This means that the distinction between the qualities of honour (*dignitas*) and mastery (*auctoritas*) distinguished the master from the slave, and these same traits maintained the emperor's role and rule (Lowe, 2011:224). This was distinctive of Roman ideology.

In the Greek–Roman world, the connection between the discussion of assumption and the discussion of the state plays a very important role in interpreting the use of norms by early Christianity. Lincoln (1990:358) argues that the household code was generally considered important, a matter of crucial social and political concern, and its downfall viewed as a potential threat to the entire society, overthrowing the traditional hierarchical order.

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<sup>84</sup> This is evident in Aristotle's economic and political science writings.

<sup>85</sup> The concept of *pietas* was a virtue not only of the emperor but also in the hierarchy within the family (D'Angelo, 2003:144).

The Colossians household did not deny the hierarchical social order of Rome, but rather acted as a microcosm of society (Henderson, 2006:423). However, the Colossians household surely contrasted with the authoritarian powers of society by establishing ethical standards of love (Col. 3:14,19), justice and fairness (Col. 4:1).<sup>86</sup> Therefore, the Colossians household did not deny the hierarchical social order of Rome, and described submission to the authority of Christ, not the power of humans, and not in terms of oppressive domination, but of qualities that affirm the dignity of those over whom they preside. Henderson (2006:425) says that “Christ’s lordship constitutes the eschatological activity of God at work to transform the power structure that characterized first-century Greco-Roman household relationships”.

#### 5.4. Chapter summary

Paul proclaimed the gospel in the age of the Roman Empire. One of the important characteristics of the Roman Empire during the 1<sup>st</sup> century was that it did not consist of political, religious, or culturally separate societies. And the people of the 1<sup>st</sup> century were under the influence of emperor worship and its ideology. Kim (2008:XV) quotes Adolf Deissmann, writing that “it must not be supposed that St. Paul and his fellow believers went through the world blindfolded, unaffected by what was then moving the minds of men in great cities, namely, the imperial cult”.

It is likely that emperor worship also had a direct and indirect influence on the situation of the Colossians, as elsewhere. Although no direct archaeological evidence has been found in the Colossae region, there is much evidence of empire-related temples, altars or priests in Asia Minor.

Basically, the human patronage system, the Roman family, and Roman deities maintained the order of the Roman Empire.

Imperial language and symbols also occur in Colossians. Firstly, in the hymn of Christ (Col. 1:15–20), the words *θρόνοι* (thrones), *κυριότητες* (dominions), *ἀρχαί* (rulers) and *ἐξουσίαι* (powers), illustrated the relationship between Christ as king and the emperor as king. Secondly,

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<sup>86</sup> All social relationships are strongly emphasised in subjugation to Christ, as demonstrated in Chapter 4.

mystery and the term στοιχεῖα (elements; Col. 2:8, 20) reflect the reconciliation of Christ as related to the sacred ritual of the emperor image. Thirdly, the terms maturity, unity, and baptism (Col. 3:11) emphasise the union and maturity (growing in Christ's wisdom and knowledge) of Christ as opposed to the unity and moral relationship of imperialism (symbols needed to rule the Roman Empire). In addition, Christ's maturity, in contrast to the Roman emperor's identity and power expressed in the image of clothing, is a virtue based on love in union with Christ. Maturity is linked to Paul's mission like a belt that connects everything. Finally, through the household code (Col. 3:18–25), Christ's lordship is conceptualized as being opposed to the patriarchy, which regarded the emperor as the head of every family in Rome.

Therefore, the emperor's ideology cannot be the only key to understanding Colossians, but the fact that there are elements of emperor worship and ideology should not be ignored.

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Conclusion**

Recently, not only New Testament scholars, but also historians and philosophers have used various strategies to understand Paul's historical, cultural and religious background. At the same time, interest in the culture of the Roman Empire and the emperor worship is growing (Jeffers, 2002:123). The relationship between the New Testament and the emperor worship is actively studied, but instances of relating this research to Colossians are relatively meagre.

Against this background, the goal of this thesis was to explore whether or not anti-imperialist theology is represented in Colossians. To investigate this debate, I focused on Col. 1:24–29, discussing the key terms Christ, mystery, maturity, and emperor worship, which are important concepts throughout Colossians.

The conclusion of this thesis is that Colossians contains both Jewish elements and anti-imperial theological elements. The Jewish element was explored by examining the background of Colossians (Chapter 2) and used to interrogate the question, why Christ is expressed as a mystery (Chapter 3). The anti-imperial theological elements was explored by examining Colossians and empire (Chapter 5).

In Chapter 2, the Colossians suffering a clear crisis due to the Colossian heresy was explored, and although it is difficult to identify the exact character of heresy in Colossians, the study indicates that the Colossian heresy probably included Jewish, mystic, and syncretism elements. The presence of syncretism elements reflects the situation at the time.

Chapter 3 explored the meaning of mystery expressed as Christ through intertextual analysis. Mystery has revelatory and eschatological characteristics; this concept of mystery was argued to be especially based on the book of Daniel. This indicates that Paul's understanding of mystery derives from a Jewish context. The mystery of Colossians is the kingdom of God unified and reconstituted in Christ. This is that Jew or Gentile are one in Christ. In Christ a new identity is given, whether Gentile or Jew.

Chapter 4 used the inner and sacred texture approach to discuss how the term “in Christ” reflects the Christian identity in Colossians. Through inner texture method the functional aspects of the term “in Christ” in Colossians was analysed, focusing on the functional of the prepositional ἐν. This revealed that the term “in Christ” is indicative of the believer’s character, faith, and behaviour through the union with Christ. Sacred texture analysis revealed that the Christian’s identity reflects their real life at the time, having a communal rather than an individual character.

Using social and cultural texture analysis and ideological texture analysis, Chapter 5 explored the presence of anti-imperial messages (in addition to Jewish elements). One undeniable fact is that Paul proclaimed the gospel under Roman imperial rule. An important feature of this era was that unlike today, it was not a political, religious or culturally separate society.

Archaeological evidence from near the Colossae area indicates the strong possibility that the emperor worship had a direct and indirect effect on the situation of the Colossians. Colossians also frequently reflects notions of the ideology of the emperor. In particular, support for the empire included “military conquest, the system of patronage, the imperial cult, the rhetoric of peace, prosperity, concord and the ideology of imperial benevolence”, and its influence would have been the strongest at the ideological level, which could be linked to other dimensions of the 1<sup>st</sup> century (Punt, 2001:55). Therefore, the terms and images of imperialism in Colossians seem to be sufficient to have created anti-imperial theology messages and tensions, even if Paul claimed not to write directly against the empire. Nor can it be ignored that the empire worship and ideology and its social institutions were also in tension with the gospel of the kingdom of God which Paul proclaimed.

When Paul wrote Colossians, Paul clearly recognised that a different form of ideology to that of the gospel of the kingdom of God existed in the empire. One practical example is the household code (Chapter 4, 5). The household code actually reflects the societal system of the empire. The imperial household code supports obedience to masculine power. But obedience in Christ is emphasised in the household code in Colossians, and this is another level of obedience. It does not indicate superiority of males, husbands and masters. Emphasising another level of obedience in Christ reveals a relationship of absolute mutual equality. Thus, Colossians is not just a victory over the Roman Empire, but a victory over Satan’s kingdom,

encouraging believers to seek the kingdom of God – a kingdom ruled by God, not a kingdom ruled by the emperor.

Hence, Colossians presents both Paul's Jewish heritage and anti-empire theology in the reality of life during the empire. Wright (2000:181) notes that Paul was firmly rooted in the Jewish heritage, in consciousness of the criticism of the empire. Jewish thought formed the driving force of his rejection of the empire as expressed in terms of Paul's high Christology. Perhaps Paul's Jewish heritage that combined with his anti-imperial theology message is a reflection of his identity and worldview. This identity is an important issue. As we discussed earlier in Chapter 4 (inner texture and sacred texture analysis), this is because Christian identity reflects real life as communal as well as an individual.

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